Let's talk about it

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Publication date:
2007

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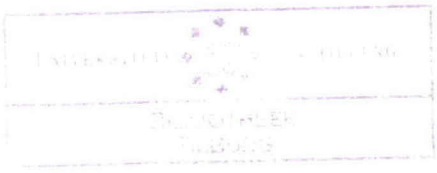

Let's Talk About It:
Studies on the Social Sharing of Emotions

Inge M. Wetzer

Let's Talk About It:
Studies on the Social Sharing of Emotions

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Tilburg
op gezag van de rector magnificus
prof. dr. F. A. van der Duyn Schouten

in het openbaar te verdedigen ten overstaan van een
door het college voor promoties aangewezen commissie
in de aula van de Universiteit
op vrijdag 9 februari 2007 om 14.15 uur

door Inge Maria Wetzer
geboren op 10 september 1979 te 's-Hertogenbosch

Promotores:

Prof. Dr. M. Zeelenberg
Prof. Dr. R. Pieters

Druk: Ridderprint Offsetdrukkerij B.V., Ridderkerk
Omslagontwerp: Suzan de Boone & Mieke van den Oever

Contents

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Chapter 1

The Social Sharing of Specific Emotions: An Introduction

One morning, when sitting behind my computer, wondering how to start the introduction of my dissertation, my best friend called. She said: "They bumped into my car and didn't leave a message! How could they! I know you can't do anything about it, but I am so angry, and I just wanted to tell it to you..." Even though I felt sorry for her, I could not hide a smile, since she exactly performed the behavior I have been investigating the last four years – social sharing of emotions.

Social sharing forms a considerable part of our daily lives (Rimé, Mesquita, Philippot, & Boca, 1991). Both positive and negative emotional events are shared, but the focus of the present research is on sharing negative events. After all, negatively valenced events have a stronger impact on individuals than positively valenced events, and the effects of negative events last longer than those of positive events (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). In addition, the emotions elicited by negative situations are more intense than the emotions elicited by positive situations (Curci & Bellelli, 2004), and there are many more differentiated negative emotions than positive emotions[1].

Although social sharing of negative emotions is important in our lives, relatively little is known about it. Research to date mainly focused on describing aspects, such as how soon, how often, and with whom people talk (Pennebaker, Zech, & Rimé, 2001; Rimé, Finkenauer, Luminet, Zech, & Philippot, 1998; Rimé et al., 1991; Rimé, Philippot, Boca, & Mesquita, 1992; Rimé & Zech, 2001). The results of these studies generally show that over 85% of all emotional experiences are shared and that people share shortly after the event took place – over 50% the same day. In addition, the majority of people – also over 50% – tends to share recurrently with multiple persons, and people

[1] If you doubt whether this is true, write down all emotions you can think of. When you classify these emotions according to their valence (positive versus negative), you will see that the negative emotions outnumber the positive ones.

share most with intimates. However, besides these describing aspects, little is known about sharing. For example, questions such as why people share or which response they prefer to obtain when they share hardly received attention.

It is a widely held belief that we should talk about our negative experiences because doing so will be beneficial to overcome the negative emotions associated with them (Zech, 1998). In addition, sharing negative emotions is a behavior that people engage in deliberately, despite the fact that they re-experience the negative emotions when they share, which is clearly undesirable. Various studies tested whether the extent of social sharing predicts emotional recovery from a certain experience (for an overview, see Rimé et al., 1998). Emotional recovery is defined as the change over time of the arousal that is still elicited when a given emotional memory is re-accessed (Pennebaker et al., 2001). In these studies, recovery was assessed as the difference between the initial intensity of the emotion that is elicited by the experience and the intensity of the emotion that is elicited when the memory of the experience was reactivated later. These studies consistently failed to find that social sharing reduces the emotional load that is associated with a negative experience. In two different studies, Finkenauer and Rimé (1998) investigated whether recalling shared emotional experiences was associated with a lower intensity of emotions than recalling emotional experiences that were kept secret. They found no differences, which again suggests that people do not benefit from sharing their emotional experiences. In line with this, a study among widows and widowers showed that disclosure of emotion was associated with a reduction of the level of distress people experience after the loss of a loved one (Stroebe, Stroebe, Schut, Zech, & Van den Bout, 2002). In a similar vein, a review of research on the impact of sharing emotions in bereavement showed that social sharing did not facilitate adjustment to loss in bereavement (Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2005). Of course, there are other positive consequences that can result from sharing, yet studies on the effects of sharing remain inconclusive about these potential other benefits.

It appears that three points have been overlooked by previous social sharing research. First, specific emotions differ qualitatively from each other. Research should distinguish between specific emotions rather than investigating the consequences of social sharing of emotional experiences in general. For

example, sharing regret may be very different from sharing anger with regard to various aspects, such as the content of the interaction and its outcomes. Second, the motivations that people have for sharing should be taken into account. If we are interested in the consequences of sharing, we should first know why people engage in it. Only if we know what people want to achieve when they share, we can compare this motivation with the outcomes of sharing and determine whether they benefited from it. Third, social sharing, by its very nature, is an interaction. This means that besides a person sharing negative feelings (the source), there is also an interaction partner who responds to the sharing (the responder). Social sharing is not a one-way communication, and the response that people receive may be influential in determining its outcomes. Depending on the motivation people have for sharing, they may desire a specific response from the responder. The outcomes of sharing may be more beneficial when people receive a response that is congruent with their motivation for sharing.

The present dissertation aims to fill these three gaps in knowledge on social sharing, by investigating the motivations and responses for social sharing, and by testing whether these differ for different emotions. The studies reported extend the existing literature in various ways. First, the studies show the predicted emotion-specific differences in social sharing. This implies that social sharing is an emotion-specific concept, being distinct for different emotions, rather than a unity. Realizing this sheds new light on how it should be investigated. That is, research on social sharing should thus not investigate it as a general construct. Rather, it should focus on which specific emotion is being shared.

Second, investigating the motivations for social sharing provides valuable information that goes beyond its observable aspects that have been investigated previously. Taking the motivations into account elaborates the social sharing process as it has been conceptualized previously. Instead of assuming that emotion in general leads to sharing, I propose that specific emotions lead to specific motivations for sharing, which in turn leads to sharing. Understanding why people share their emotions is a necessary step in assessing its outcomes. Only by knowing what motivates people to share their emotions, research can focus on whether people achieved what they wanted to achieve. After all, how can we investigate whether people benefit from a certain

behavior if we have no insights in their motivations for performing this behavior?

Third, the present dissertation extends existing social sharing literature by viewing it as an interaction. The behavior is called *social* sharing. If research aims to understand social sharing, the response should also be taken into account. In other words, social sharing not only involves the verbal expression of emotions, there is also a responder who plays a role in determining its consequences. Taking the response that people receive into account thus provides insight into the interaction that takes place during social sharing. This is valuable since this interaction may be crucial in determining the consequences that result from it.

The fourth and final contribution of the present dissertation is that it integrates traditional social sharing theory with insights from literatures on different, though related phenomena (such as word-of-mouth communication and complaining in social interaction). Some aspects of social sharing (such as its frequency and sharing partners) have been investigated intensely by previous research. Other aspects however (e.g., content of sharing and responses that people receive), received less attention. In order to picture the social sharing process as precisely as possible, I turn to literature on various fields that are related to social sharing. Most of these literatures focused on different aspects than the traditional social sharing research. Although the phenomena studied are somewhat different from social sharing, the insights from these fields are used to investigate motivations, content, and responses of sharing.

Most closely related to social sharing is the stream of literature on word-of-mouth communication, defined as informal communication between private parties about goods and services and their evaluations thereof. In the majority of the cases, word-of-mouth communication involves emotions. Research on word-of-mouth communication, typically conducted in the field of marketing and consumer behavior, showed that one of its main antecedents is the experience of negative emotions such as dissatisfaction and anger (Anderson, 1998; Bougie, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2003; Maute & Forrester, 1993). Word-of-mouth communication can thus be considered as a specific form of social sharing, namely social sharing about consumption experiences.

Research on word-of-mouth communication has mainly investigated its effects on the interaction partner, in most cases a (potential) customer of the service or product, and the antecedents that lead to word-of-mouth communication, such as perceived injustice, dissatisfaction, and product importance. Remarkably, although different aspects are investigated in word-of-mouth research and social sharing research, both streams of research do not focus on the interactive nature of the sharing. In addition, whereas social sharing research implicitly assumes that people share their emotions with someone who is not involved in the negative situation, in marketing, a clear distinction is made between word-of-mouth communication and complaining. This distinction is based on the person with whom people share their emotions, namely a non-involved person in word-of-mouth communication, and the person they perceive to be responsible for the negative situation in complaining. In this dissertation, this interesting distinction made in marketing research is applied to social sharing.

The remainder of this introductory chapter elaborates on each of the three gaps that in my opinion exist in previous social sharing research. It will say more about emotion-specificity in social sharing, about the role of the motivations, as well as about the role of responses. However, first it shall describe how emotions are conceptualized. After all, in order to investigate the social sharing of emotions, we should first understand what we exactly share.

WHAT IS AN EMOTION?

Emotions are states that are elicited by appraisals, and expressed in behavior. Each emotional state is characterized by a specific experiential content, consisting of thoughts, feelings, goals, and action tendencies (Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994). The specific experiential content is different for each specific emotion. That is, anger is related to different thoughts (e.g., think of violence towards others), feelings (e.g., feel that you'd explode) and goals (e.g., want to hurt someone) than regret, which is related to thoughts about a lost opportunity and of what a mistake you made, sinking feelings, and goals of wanting to improve your performance and wanting to get a second chance.

Emotions are not elicited by the situations or events per se. Instead, the appraisals are responsible for the evocation of emotions (Frijda, 1986; Frijda &

Zeelenberg, 2001; Roseman & Smith, 2001; Stein, Trabasso, & Liwag, 1993). Appraisals are evaluations of what one's relationship to the environment implies for personal harm or benefit (Smith & Lazarus, 1993). It is the way people appraise the situation, rather than the situation in itself, that determines whether they experience an emotion. A particular situation only evokes emotions when it is judged as relevant to someone. Imagine for example a lottery drawing in which final number to win the jackpot is announced and it does not match your lottery ticket. If all other numbers at your ticket were correct, you would be very disappointed, since the drawing of the final number was very relevant to you. If none of the other numbers at your ticket was correct however, you would not be disappointed by the drawing of the last number, since this was not relevant to you at all.

Beyond emotion elicitation, appraisals determine which specific emotion is experienced. In other words, every emotion is associated with a unique pattern of appraisals (Frijda, 1986; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Smith & Lazarus, 1993). There are various appraisal dimensions along which situations can be evaluated. For example, the outcomes of a situation may be certain or uncertain, a situation can be expected or unexpected, and it may be self-caused, other-caused, or circumstances-caused (Roseman, 2001). How a person appraises an event or situation determines which emotion he or she experiences. For example, the anger that is experienced when someone bumped into your parked car may be elicited by the appraisals that someone else is accountable for the negative situation, and that the negative outcomes are certain. However, when you knew you parked your car at a very unsafe and risky corner, you may perceive yourself as accountable, and you may experience regret. The same situation may thus elicit different emotions when it is appraised differently. In a similar vein, different situations with a similar appraisal pattern will evoke the same emotion.

When emotions are evoked, this mobilizes people to undertake action. Emotions arise when people detect a discrepancy between their current state and their goal. "The primary function is to mobilize the organism to deal quickly with important interpersonal encounters" (Ekman, 1992, p. 171). Thus emotions provide information about the goal-achievement, and mobilize to undertake action when necessary (Stein et al., 1993). However, the impact of emotion goes beyond mobilization: emotions also give direction to behavior.

Motivation is one of the core aspects of emotions, since "emotions are closely and intimately related to action by way of their nature as motivational states" (Frijda, 2004, p. 159). Particular emotions are related to particular modes of action readiness (Frijda, Kuipers, & Ter Schure, 1989; Roseman et al., 1994). Action readiness can be defined as action tendencies or impulses to engage in interaction with the environment, and to states of activation in doing so (Frijda et al., 1989). When people encounter a situation that evokes emotions, they become prepared or tend to act in certain ways. These reactions include establishing, maintaining, or disrupting one's relationship with an object. For example, when people walk on the street at night and feel that someone is following them, they might experience fear and feel the tendency to run away. When they meet a friend, they might feel happy and feel the tendency to approach this friend to have a talk. In other words, what kind of action people tend to perform is related to the emotion they experience.

THE SPECIFIC EMOTIONS APPROACH

In investigating the process of social sharing, I adopt the emotion-specific approach. There is a stream of literature that categorizes emotions into two groups – positive and negative emotions. This is called the valence-based approach, in which the valence of an emotion plays a central role in the theorizing about and examination of emotions (Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999). Although valence is an important dimension along which emotions can be distinguished, concentrating only on this dimension implies that different emotions of the same valence have similar effects on feelings, goals, and behavior. From studies that investigated differences between specific emotions with the same valence, we learn that this is not the case. Rather, distinguishing specific emotions with the same valence has proven to be very useful (Lazarus, 2001). Studies examining this issue showed that specific emotions differ with respect to various aspects, such as appraisal patterns, feelings, thoughts, action tendencies, actions, and emotivational goals (e.g., Frijda et al., 1989; Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Roseman et al., 1994). Take for example anger and regret. Despite the fact that these emotions have the same valence, experiencing regret feels qualitatively different from experiencing anger, is related to different action tendencies, and activates different goals (Roseman et al., 1994). The specific emotions approach holds that emotions should be distinguished on more dimensions besides valence,

and that each specific emotion has its own thoughts, feelings, action readiness modes, appraisals, action tendencies, actions, and emotivational goals.

The remainder of this introduction describes the four contributions of the present dissertation. First, it will elaborate on why it is important to distinguish among specific emotions when investigating social sharing. Second, it will focus on the motivations for socially sharing emotions, and finally, it will elaborate on the responses to social sharing. The last part of the introduction provides an overview of the research reported in this dissertation.

EMOTION SPECIFICITY IN SOCIAL SHARING

As described in the previous section, specific emotions are qualitatively different from each other. From this it can be deduced that social sharing should not be investigated as a unitary concept, but as one that differs for different emotions. For example, angry people may have different motivations and they may desire different responses than people who share regret. As a result, the consequences of sharing emotions may be different per emotion. There may be different things at stake when people experience different emotions. For example, regret is a threat to people's self-esteem whereas anger is not. Consequently, when sharing regret, people may try to enhance their self-esteem, while angry people may not. Sharing regret may be beneficial for people because it increases their self-esteem, whereas sharing anger has no effect on self-esteem. Instead of investigating why people share their emotions or whether it is beneficial to share emotions, research should investigate per emotion why people share it, and whether or when it is beneficial to share this particular emotion.

Some previous research also acknowledged the importance of distinguishing among specific emotions when investigating social sharing, yet the results remain inconclusive (Rimé et al., 1998). However, emotion specificity may be relevant for particular aspects of social sharing. I hypothesize that especially the motivations for sharing and consequently the responses that people desire can be dependent on the specific emotion that people experience. Previous research mainly investigated whether the general characteristics of sharing (e.g., the delay of sharing and the type of sharing partner) differ for specific emotions (e.g., Rimé et al., 1991). Some studies show emotion-specific

differences for these characteristics whereas others do not. More specifically, it seems that experiences are socially shared in the majority of cases, regardless of the type of emotion that people experience (Rimé et al., 1991). In addition, there were no effects across emotions on the number of people with whom people share, the number of times people share, and the type of person with whom people share. In contrast, it was also found that people share experiences of shame with a more restricted range of people (mainly spouse/partner or friends). The latter finding is also supported in a cross-cultural study in which Indian, immigrant Indian, and English people completed a questionnaire on the sharing of an experience of fear, an experience of shame, and an experience of sadness (Singh-Manoux & Finkenauer, 2001). In addition, whereas Rimé et al. (1991) did not find that the frequency of sharing shame differs from the frequency of sharing four other emotions, Singh-Manoux and Finkenauer (2001) found that shame was shared fewer times and with fewer people.

In addition, Rimé et al. (1991) found that shame is shared after a greater delay than other emotions. Moreover, their results revealed that anger and fear are shared sooner than other emotions. However, in an overview of different studies, Rimé et al. (1992) describe other (unpublished) data in which this effect for fear was not replicated. Other emotion-specific effects found by Singh-Manoux and Finkenauer (2001) were that shame and fear were less likely to be initiated by the sharer him/herself than sadness, that people who shared shame were less likely to intimately share their feelings, but more likely to tell factual details compared to people who shared fear or sadness. In addition, people who shared fear asked more for help or advice than people who share shame or sadness. Fear was associated with more active responses from the interaction partner, whereas sadness was associated with more supportive responses. Also the perceived effects of sharing differed between fear, sadness and shame.

All in all, there seems to be some evidence of emotion specificity in social sharing, but this evidence is weak and somewhat contradictory. The series of studies in this dissertation provides first evidence for the idea that social sharing should be conceived of as an emotion-specific phenomenon. The studies will show for which aspects sharing is different per emotion. In addition, this research will investigate for different specific emotions with

which motivations, content, responses, and consequences of social sharing they are associated.

MOTIVATIONS FOR SOCIALLY SHARING EMOTIONS

Motivations are at the core of understanding social sharing. To understand, predict, and investigate a certain behavior and its related outcomes, it is important to have insight into why people perform it. In the present dissertation, the motivations for social sharing are studied. Moreover, beyond addressing the motivations, the present research will investigate emotion-specificity of the motivations. I expect that the motivation that people have for sharing their emotions is dependent on the specific emotion they experience. For example, when people are angry, they may share this with others because they want to ventilate their anger or because they want to take revenge at the person they perceive to be responsible for the negative situation. When people feel regret, there is no other person that can be blamed, and there are no angry feelings to be vented. When sharing regret, different motivations may thus be relevant, such as warning another person against making similar mistakes, or asking for advice on how to handle the situation or the emotions that are evoked by it. Finding specific emotion-motivation linkages in social sharing would demonstrate the usefulness of examining the specific motivations underlying the sharing of specific emotions rather than just examining the general motivation for sharing negative emotions at large.

Support for the idea that specific emotions are related to specific motivations for sharing comes from various related streams of literature. First, at the more general level of implicit social motives (e.g., intimacy motivation and achievement motivation), research has shown that specific emotions are linked to specific motivations (Zurbriggen & Sturman, 2002). This more general linkage between emotions and motivations provides support for the idea that it makes sense to search for relationships between specific emotions and specific motivations. Second, besides the fact that emotion research has established that specific emotions differ in their action tendencies, thoughts, and feelings (Frijda et al., 1989; Smith & Lazarus, 1993), specific emotions have distinctive motivations (also called emotivational goals) (Nelissen, Dijker, & De Vries, 2006a; Roseman et al., 1994). Thus, at a more specific level, it may be speculated that specific emotions are associated with different, specific

motivations for sharing as well. Third, studies on how people cope with negative consumption experiences showed that the coping strategy that people use is dependent on the specific emotion they experience (Duhachek, 2005; Yi & Baumgartner, 2004). For example, angry consumers have the tendency to respond with a confrontive or active coping style (i.e., arguing their case and trying to change the situation) whereas consumers who experience regret tend to reinterpret the situation in a positive way and to accept it. Since coping is defined as attempts to manage stressful situations, it is closely related to motivations for sharing, since the motivations for sharing reflect the way in which people try to deal with stressful situations. In this dissertation, the motivations for social sharing are studied, and their relationships with specific emotions are tested. In the next section, the responses that people receive when they share their emotions with others are addressed.

RESPONSES TO SOCIAL SHARING

The response that sources receive after sharing their emotions may be very influential in determining how they feel after sharing. People may share for a variety of reasons, and whether they achieved their goal is dependent on the response they received. Take the example of Peter who regrets having waited too long to contact a girl he met and really liked. He might share his regret with John because he wants to receive advice on what he should do now. The effects of sharing in that case depend on John's response. If John gives Peter advice, Peter achieved his goal and may feel relieved. If John responds by saying that he acted indeed very stupid and that he would feel regret too, he does not give advice, and Peter did not achieve his goal.

Little is known about the impact of the response that the sources receive from their interaction partners. This is surprising because social sharing is in its very essence a social interaction, and thus the consequences of sharing are most likely to depend on the response. Note that the current focus is on *verbal* responses only. There are various ways in which interaction partners can react verbally to sources, for example by giving advice, de-dramatizing the situation, or confirming the source (Christophe & Rimé, 1997). Each of these responses may have distinct effects on how sources feel after sharing. Although it seems reasonable to assume that some responses are more preferred or more helpful overall than others, I argue that the effects of a particular response are

determined by its congruency with the specific emotion that sources share. For example, when people experience regret and share this, they may feel better when their interaction partner de-dramatizes the negative situation. The same de-dramatizing response, however, may fail to result in positive effects when provided to people who experience anger. Thus, the response that people receive may play an important role in determining the consequences of sharing, and importantly, the effects of a particular response may be different when it is provided to people who share different emotions.

When experiencing a particular emotion, people are prepared for a particular mode of action. Which action people tend to perform is thus dependent on the emotion they experience. This may also hold for sharing. For example, when sharing anger, people may feel the need to talk negatively about the cause of their anger in order to hurt the other. However, when people share regret they may feel the need to strengthen their social bonds in order to buffer their self-evaluation. The response that people desire from their interaction partner may thus be dependent on the emotion they experience. This would imply that the effect of a particular response to social sharing is not uniform, but rather depends on the congruency with the emotion it is given to. Initial support for the idea that a particular response can produce multiple effects comes from a study on consolation (Horowitz et al., 2001). This study showed that people who shared for communal reasons (i.e., reasons associated with interpersonal affect, such as being loved or understood) were more satisfied when they received communal reactions. In contrast, people who shared for agentic reasons (i.e., reasons associated with problem-solving, such as striving for control) were more satisfied after an agentic response.

In the present dissertation, the desired and the received response are investigated, as well as whether these differ for specific emotions. In addition, studies are reported that test the idea that sharing yields positive outcomes if emotion-response congruency occurs.

OVERVIEW OF THIS DISSERTATION

As explained previously, in the present dissertation, a series of studies is reported in which emotion specificity of various aspects of social sharing is tested. Each chapter addresses a specific aspect of social sharing – motivations, desired responses, received responses, and outcomes – as described in the previous sections and attempts to investigate whether it is dependent on the emotion that people experience.

Chapter 2 describes studies that examine the general idea of emotion-specificity in social sharing. These studies investigate this idea in the first part of the social sharing process after the emotion elicitation – the motivations. In this chapter a model is developed of specific relationships between emotions and motivations for social sharing. More specifically, specific predictions are made on how anger and regret are related to the following motivations for sharing: venting, support search, advice search, revenge, warning, bonding, and entertaining. This model is tested in Study 2.1 by means of a survey study in a consumption domain. The results of this study support the general idea that specific emotions are linked to particular motivations for sharing. They also show which specific relationships between anger and regret and motivations for sharing exist. Study 2.2 elaborates and extends these findings by using a different methodology. More specifically, a diary study is used to tap experiences more proximally. In addition, it focuses on the general domain of specific emotions instead of consumption experiences only, and instead of measuring emotions, it directly samples the emotions anger and regret. The results of this study are largely in line with those of Study 2.1. Together, these studies provide first evidence that emotion-specific differences of sharing exist with regard to the motivations the emotions are linked with.

Chapter 3 extends the findings of Chapter 2 to a larger range of negative emotions. In order to exclude as many intervening variables as possible, the focus is on a specific type of negative experiences – negative consumption experiences. Study 3.1 examines which specific emotions play a role in negative consumption experiences by means of retrospective experience sampling. The data show that anger, frustration, irritation, regret, disappointment, and uncertainty are relevant in this domain. Study 3.2 tests again by means of retrospective experience sampling whether these emotions

are related to specific motivations for sharing. The findings again support the basic idea and elaborate insight into the specific linkages between emotions and motivations. These studies add to the findings of Chapter 2 by showing that the specific emotion-motivation links exist for a broad range of negative emotions than only regret and anger. In addition, these studies provide insight into which motivations are linked to sharing anger, frustration, irritation, regret, disappointment and uncertainty.

Based on the findings that social sharing can be conceived of as an emotion-specific phenomenon, Chapter 4 examines the next step in the social sharing process – the responses and consequences. More specifically, it is proposed that the effects of social sharing are not only dependent on the content and the valence of the response that people receive, but on the congruency between the emotion they share and the response they receive. In other words, it is hypothesized that a particular response to social sharing only yields positive effects if it matches the emotion that is shared. This emotion-response congruency hypothesis is tested in three studies. Study 4.1 tests whether the responses that people prefer to receive when they share their experiences are emotion-specific, by examining for a range of possible responses which ones are congruent with which specific emotion (again anger and regret). The results show that the response that people prefer is indeed dependent on the specific emotion they experience. Study 4.2 examines whether the responses that responders actually provide are also emotion-specific. The data of this study show that the responses provided are less emotion-specific than the responses preferred. In Study 4.3 the emotion-response congruency hypothesis is tested, and the results show that socially sharing emotions is only beneficial when the response that people receive is congruent with the emotion that they share. Thus, people prefer a particular response when they share a specific emotion, but they do not always receive specific responses. Social sharing only yields positive outcomes if the response that is obtained is congruent with the emotion that is shared.

Chapter 5 moves beyond demonstrating emotion specificity and addresses another factor that may be important in determining the consequences of sharing. This chapter focuses on anger only. Three studies test whether it makes a difference to whom people share their emotions. More specifically, it is hypothesized that it makes a difference whether people share their emotions

with the person they perceive to be responsible for the negative situation (the perpetrator), or with a person who is not involved in the situation (third party). The results of Study 5.1 and 5.2 show that sharing with the responsible person leads to more intense positive emotions. Study 5.3 reveals that these results can be explained by the fact that people who share with the perpetrator feel that they stood up for themselves. In addition, this study excludes retribution as possible explanation for the positive effects of sharing with the perpetrator.

Finally, Chapter 6 provides a conclusion of the studies presented and discusses the contributions and limitations of the research presented in this dissertation. It also outlines various avenues for future research.

Let us now turn to the empirical part of this dissertation. The following four chapters are based on individual papers that have either been published or have been submitted. Since these chapters were originally intended to be read separately, overlap between chapters may exist.

Chapter 2

Motivations for Socially Sharing Emotions: Why Being Specific Matters[2]

Although there are speculations about various motivations for socially sharing negative emotions (Kowalski, 1996, 2002; Luminet, Bouts, Delie, Manstead, & Rimé, 2000), to our best knowledge, this has have never been the subject of systematic empirical testing. However, if our goal is to understand specific behaviors, we should first know what prompts people to perform them. Thus the central question in the present research is: *Why* do people share their daily negative emotions?

Rather than focusing on negative emotional experiences in general, we explore differences between two specific negative emotions. We do so for the following reasons. First, at a more general level, research has shown that specific emotions are linked to specific motivations (Zurbriggen & Sturman, 2002). Second, emotion research has established that specific emotions have distinctive motivations (also called emotivational goals) (Roseman et al., 1994). Thus, we speculate that, at a more specific level, specific emotions are associated with different, specific motivations for sharing as well. Finding specific emotion-motivation linkages in social sharing would demonstrate the usefulness of examining the specific motivations underlying the sharing of specific emotions rather than just examining the general motivation for sharing negative emotions at large.

Motivations For Socially Sharing Negative Emotions

Luminet et al. (2000), in their discussion, propose that people might engage in socially sharing their emotions for various reasons, such as to process emotional and goal-related information, to reduce anxiety through the presence of others, or to seek for advice (achieve cognitive clarity about the situation or responses). These speculations provide a valuable starting point

[2] This chapter is based on Wetzer, Zeelenberg & Pieters (2006d)

for investigating the motivations relevant in social sharing, and they prompted the current research.

To gain more insight into potentially relevant motivations, we turned to literature on three topics that are closely related to social sharing. Interestingly, we found that these different literatures have emphasized not only related motivations, but also different motivations which have not been integrated yet. In consumer psychology, there is a stream of literature on word-of-mouth communication, which – defined as informal communications between private parties about experiences with goods and services (Anderson, 1998) – can be conceived of as a special form of social sharing, namely sharing consumption experiences. We found two studies on word-of-mouth that addressed why people shared their negative consumption experiences with others (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Sundaram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998). The motivations emerging from this literature are: venting one's feelings, taking revenge on the person responsible for the negative feelings, seeking for advice on what to do next, warning someone else not to make a similar mistake, and strengthening or stressing social bonds with the interaction partner (bonding).

Another stream of literature that addressed motivations concentrated on complaining in social interactions. Complaining is defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction, whether subjectively experienced or not, for the purpose of venting emotions or achieving intrapsychic goals, interpersonal goals, or both" (Kowalski, 1996, p. 180), thus closely related to sharing negative emotions. As its definition already suggests, there are multiple motivations for people to complain. A diary study (Alicke et al., 1992) and a literature review (Kowalski, 1996) on motivations for everyday complaining showed some overlap with the motivations revealed by the literature mentioned previously – venting, warning, advice seeking, and bonding. In addition, this work also brings up two new motivations: support seeking and entertaining.

A last topic closely related to social sharing in which motivations received attention is emotional disclosure. In an attempt to gain insight into parents' disclosure of their own lives and concerns with their late-adolescent children and in disclosure between college students and their siblings, Dolgin (1996; Dolgin & Lindsay, 1999) proposed various motivations for disclosure. Some of

these are specific to the context of parent-child disclosure (e.g., to teach), others are focused on positive emotions (e.g., to share good news). However, the majority of motivations put forward in these studies can be applied to a broader range of situations in which people share experiences: to vent, to receive support, to receive advice, and to feel closer (bonding).

Integrating the ideas from the social sharing literature with these three related streams of literature, there appear to be the following seven motivations that may fuel socially sharing negative experiences are: (1) Venting, (2) support seeking, (3) revenge, (4) advice seeking, (5) bonding, (6) warning, and (7) entertaining. Each of these motivations is described in Table 2.1. This table also represents the items to measure them in the empirical studies. Note that we left out the motivation of anxiety reduction, since we think this motivation only plays a role when people experience extremely intense emotions, which are not the target of this research. In addition, we merged the motivations to process information and to search for advice since these are both concerned with understanding and coming to terms with the situation.

When structuring the motivations for sharing, a pattern emerged according to their focus. First, some motivations are focused on the self (Kowalski, 1996). When sharing for personal reasons, people are concerned with achieving something for themselves. Motivations that belong to this category are venting, advice seeking, and support seeking. The second category consists of motivations focused on the self in relationship with the interaction partner (Kowalski, 2002) and includes the motivations entertaining and bonding. The last category consists of motivations focused on someone else (the interaction partner or the perpetrator) (Alicke et al., 1992; Kowalski, 2002). When sharing for these reasons, people hope to please the interaction partner or to harm the perpetrator of the negative event. This category of motivations consists of warning and revenge.

Predictions

To investigate whether emotions-specific effects of social sharing exist, we singled out two relevant emotions here, rather than investigating the whole range of negative emotions. Following the suggestions of Lerner and Keltner (2000), we compare emotions that differ on the cognitive appraisal dimension

that is related to the outcomes of interest. Since the outcome of our interest – motivations for sharing – can be categorized according to the person it is focused on, we concentrate on the appraisal dimension of responsibility (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). In the present research, we focus on two emotions that are clearly differentiated by the appraisal dimension of responsibility: anger and regret. After a negative experience, people may attribute the cause of their negative feelings to someone else, which results in anger (Frijda et al., 1989; Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985), or to themselves, which results in regret (Frijda et al., 1989; Zeelenberg, Van Dijk, Manstead, & Van der Pligt, 2000).

The central theme of anger is 'other-blame' (Smith & Lazarus, 1993), which suggests that anger has a relationship with other-focused motivations. In line with this, angry people are more likely to pursue the goals of 'wanting to hurt someone' and 'wanting to get back at someone' than people who experience other emotions (Bougie et al., 2003; Roseman et al., 1994), thus suggesting that anger is related to the motivation to take revenge. Other typical behavioral responses to anger are complaining, yelling, and screaming (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987). This is in line with catharsis theory (Breuer & Freud, 1955), which states that people better let anger out to protect it from building up to a more dangerous explosion. Thus, we predict that anger in our research will be related to the motivation to ventilate feelings. Besides the typical destruction response (revenge) and the typical catharsis response (venting), we expect a relationship between anger and support seeking. This prediction is based on the fact that angry people attribute the negative situation to another person, thus do not perceive themselves as responsible. When they are supported by others in this view, they might become more certain of this attribution, which may be desirable.

The second emotion we investigate is regret. The core of regret is a feeling that outcomes would have been better if one had acted differently (Zeelenberg et al., 2000). This emotion is closely related to guilt (Mandel, 2003; Shaver et al., 1987). Previous research showed that experiencing guilt increases prosocial behavior (De Hooge, Zeelenberg, & Breugelmans, 2006; Ketelaar & Au, 2003; Nelissen, Dijker, & De Vries, 2006b). Based on this research, we expect that sharing regret is related to social motivations. More specifically, we propose that regret is related to bonding and warning. The latter expectation is also

based on the fact that regret is felt when people see themselves as responsible for a negative experience, which may result in a desire to prevent others from making a similar mistake. In addition, people who experience regret may turn to others in order to gather advice on how to solve the problem or how to handle the situation. Finally, negative feelings about the self may make people reluctant to share their experience with others. In support of this, Zeelenberg and Pieters (1999) found that people who experience regret after a service failure are less likely to share this than disappointed people are. Regret may be more difficult to share, thus this emotion will especially not be shared just for fun. We thus expect that regret is negatively related to entertaining.

Summarizing, in the present research we test the general hypothesis that specific emotions are related to specific motivations for social sharing. Based on previous work we focus on two emotions, and have specific expectations for each emotion. For anger, we expect a relationship with the motivations of venting, revenge, and support seeking. For regret, we expect a relationship with warning, bonding, advice seeking, and a negative relationship with entertaining. These predictions were first examined in a survey study (Study 2.1) in which participants of various ages and backgrounds reported on their emotions and motivations the last time they shared their dissatisfaction about a product or service with someone else. In Study 2.2 we examine our expectations in a more general domain – daily negative experiences – using a method that taps experiences more proximally – diary study.

STUDY 2.1

Method

Participants

Trained assistants recruited participants from their social network, from various ages and backgrounds, to gain a heterogeneous sample of participants (Keaveney, 1995). Two hundred and twelve participants (107 women and 105 men, mean age 38, age ranged from 16 to 83) participated on a voluntary basis. Of the participants, 2% had a primary school education only, 55% had a secondary school education, 36% had completed high school education, and 7% had completed University master education.

Procedure and material

Participants individually completed a questionnaire at home or at the place where they were contacted, such as at home, at work, or the assistant's home. All instructions were written on the questionnaire. First, they were instructed to think of the last time they shared dissatisfaction about a service or a product with others (recall that we chose for one specific situation to rule out interfering variables). Participants were asked to provide a written description of what exactly happened. Next, they answered some closed-ended questions about the observable aspects of the sharing situation (adopted from Rimé et al., 1991): "How long ago did this experience happen?" (less than a week, 1 week - 1 month, 1-3 months, 3-6 months, 6-12 months, more than 12 months). "How long was the time between the experience and the first time you shared it?" (less than 15 minutes, 15 minutes - 1 hour, 1 hour - half a day, half a day - 1 day, more than 1 day). "With whom did you share this experience first?" (partner, close friend, colleague, acquaintance, relative, someone else). This procedure was adopted for two reasons: First, when people recall and describe an episode from their memory concerning a particular emotion, they display the (facial) expressions for this emotion (Matelesta & Izard, 1984), suggesting that it is an effective technique to assess the emotion experience. Second, it provides insight about the types of daily consumption experiences that are typically shared.

Next in the questionnaire emotions and motivations were assessed. For a list of various emotions the participants indicated the extent to which they had felt it on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*). Anger was measured by anger, frustration, and irritation. Research on emotion categorization (Shaver et al., 1987) has shown that these emotions all belong to the same emotion cluster (called anger). Regret was measured by regret, shame, and guilt. Although these emotions are not synonymous terms of regret, they all include the distinguishing element of self-blame for a negative outcome. These emotions also belong to the same emotion cluster in the categorization by Shaver et al. (1987) and are highly correlated (Mandel, 2003; Zeelenberg et al., 1998b). Next, participants indicated the motivations for sharing using a set of 21 items. Based on pilot testing, each motivation was assessed by three items (see Table 2.1). For each item, participants indicated to what extent the motivation was applicable to the first time they shared the experience on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).

Table 2.1

Motivations for socially sharing negative emotions

Motivation	Description	Items
Venting	An emotional release to get it off one's chest (Alicke et al., 1992; Dolgin & Lindsay, 1999)	I wanted to pour my heart out. I had to blow off steam. I wanted to vent my feelings.
Support seeking	Seeking comfort, moral support, or understanding (Parkinson & Totterdell, 1999)	I searched for comfort. I wanted to feel that someone understood me. I wanted a feeling of sympathy.
Revenge	"An act designed to harm someone else, or some social group, in response to the feeling that oneself has been harmed by that person or group" (Frijda, 1994, p. 265-266)	I wanted to take revenge on the responsible person for this product/service. I wanted to give this product/service provider a bad reputation. I wanted the product/service provider to lose customers.
Advice seeking	To solicit someone's input about a problem you are having (Dolgin & Lindsay, 1999)	I wanted to understand what happened. I wanted to know whether I judged the situation right. I wanted advice on how to handle my feelings.
Bonding	Strengthening social bonds and make the relationship closer (Dolgin & Lindsay, 1999; Luminet et al., 2000)	I wanted to strengthen the bond with my conversation partner. By talking openly I hoped to come closer to my conversation partner. By being open I wanted to let my conversation partner know that he/she is important to me.
Warning	"Help others by warning them about negative consequences of a particular action" (Sundaram et al., 1998, p. 530)	I wanted to help my conversation partner with making a decision. I wanted to prevent my conversation partner from making the same mistake. I wanted to warn my conversation partner not to use this product/service.
Entertaining	Lubricating social interactions by amusing other people with a story (Kowalski, 2003)	It was a nice story to tell. I wanted to make others laugh. I liked talking about this blunder.

Results

Reported experiences

A range of negative experiences was reported by the participants. Of all reported experiences, 75% was concerned with services, and 25% with products (with no differences between men and women or educational levels). Examples of problems with services that were reported are bad breakfasts in hotels, phone companies that provided false information, and internet connections that did not work. Examples of problems with products are cell phones that did not function well, shrinking clothing items, and bad smelling second-hand cars.

Specific characteristics of socially shared consumption experiences

The experiences reported were relatively recent. Almost three quarters of them had happened within the past 12 months. Of these, 34 had taken place in the week before the study, 45 took place between 1 week and 1 month before the study, 30 between 1 and 3 months before, 29 between 3 and 6 months before, and 16 between 6 and 12 months before. These experiences were shared very soon after they took place. Almost half of the participants shared their experience within 15 minutes, and even more than 80% of the participants shared it the same day. We found that 83% of the participants shared their negative experience for the first time with a close intimate; partner (44%), close friend (21%) or relative (18%). These findings are in line with previous findings on social sharing in other contexts (Rimé et al., 1991).

Motivations and emotions

To test the general idea that specific emotions are related to specific motivations for sharing, structural equations modeling (SEM) was conducted using maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS 5 (Arbuckle, 2003). First, both measurement models (for emotions and for motivations) were tested by confirmatory factor analyses (CFA).

Emotions. Anger was measured by the items frustration, irritation, and anger, and regret by shame, guilt, and regret. A two-factor CFA on this model showed an excellent fit, $x^2(8) = 11.16$, CFI = .990, TLI = .977, RMSEA = .046. The correlation between the factors was .30 ($p < .001$), which is less than unity. This supports the discriminant validity of the proposed categorization of the

emotions into the two categories anger (M = 5.92, SD = 2.30) and regret (M = 2.11, SD = 1.42) in this study.

Motivations. Our literature review revealed that seven motivations are most relevant in social sharing here. To test the proposed model of motivations, we followed the recommendation by Bagozzi and Heatherton (1994) to use a partial disaggregation approach. A partial disaggregation model uses composites of individual items as indicators of each latent construct, thereby reducing random error, which is often required in situations with multiple independent variables, here emotions, and dependent variables, here motivations. Specifically, we summed two items for each motivation to form the first indicator, and the remaining item served as the second indicator. For example, we partially disaggregated the items that were supposed to measure revenge by forming the composite indicator that consists of item 1 and item 2, and item 3 was used as the second indicator. This model also showed an excellent fit, $x^2(56)$ = 78.19, CFI = .978, TLI = .964, RMSEA = .043. Correlations between motivations are represented in Table 2.2. As a test of discriminant validity, we compared this model (in which the correlations between the latent constructs were freely estimated) against an alternative model in which these correlations are constrained to unity. The alternative model showed a significant decrease in fit, $\Delta x^2(21)$ = 137.0, p < .001, which provides evidence of discriminant validity of the measurement model for the motivations as shown in Table 2.1. Moreover, there were no gender, age, and education differences in types of motivations reported.

Table 2.2

Motivations for social sharing: summary statistics and correlations: Study 2.1

	Mean (SD)	Vent	Support	Revenge	Advice	Bonding	Warn	Entertain
Vent	4.20 (1.90)		.58	.20	.21	.32	.16	.07
Support	3.21 (1.85)			.14	.43	.36	.19	.04
Revenge	2.27 (1.68)				.05	.17	.44	.10
Advice	2.34 (1.41)					.36	.28	.09
Bonding	1.85 (1.40)						.34	.29
Warn	2.29 (1.65)							.17
Entertain	2.15 (1.62)							

Note. All correlations > .13 are significant at p < .05.

Now that we have established the discriminant validity between the two specific emotions anger and regret, and separately between the motivations to socially share them, the question becomes if and how these specific emotions are related to these specific motivations. This question we examined next.

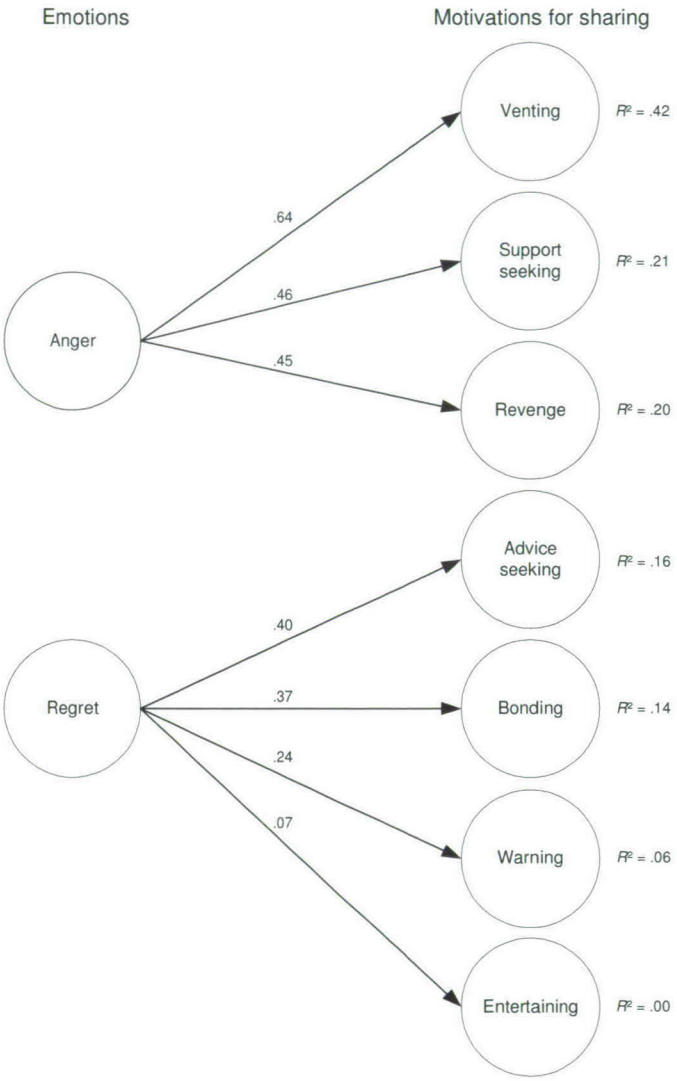

Figure 2.1

Structural model of the relationships between emotions and motivations for sharing: Study 2.1

Note. Standardized regression coefficients are significant at $p < .01$, except for the one between regret and entertaining (ns).

Emotions and motivations. The model that tested our expectations about how specific emotions are related to specific motivations (see Figure 2.1) fitted the data well ($x^2(142) = 242.50$, CFI = .935, TLI = .904, RMSEA = .058). There is strong support for both parts of the main question (see Figure 2.1): Different motivations are underlying social sharing, and there are emotion-specific effects in social sharing. Regarding the specific relationships, we found support for most of our expectations: Anger was associated with venting, support seeking, and revenge. In addition, regret was related to bonding, advice seeking, and warning. The only expected relationship that was not supported by the data was the negative relationship between regret and entertaining.

Discussion

Study 2.1 provides first evidence that people may have different motivations for sharing their emotions, and these specific motivations are related to specific emotions. More specifically, we found that people who experience anger share in order to vent their feelings, to seek for support, or to take revenge. People share regret for motivations of advice seeking, warning, and bonding. The expected negative relationship between regret and entertaining was not significant. An explanation for this might be that the current study focused on mundane instances of regret (i.e., the last time people experienced regret about a product or service). Although people may be reluctant to make fun of their own mistakes, relatively minor mistakes may be easier to laugh about with others.

In the present study, we focused on a very specific domain – negative consumption experiences – to enhance homogeneity of the reported situations. However, the negative consumption experiences domain is only one among many about which emotions are shared. Building on this first evidence that the emotion-motivation link exists in social sharing, it would be interesting to expand the domain and to test for replication in a broader range of situations.

In addition, although retrospective experience sampling provides a good opportunity to gain insight into different situations, this method may suffer from some shortcomings. First, there might be a selection in the experiences that people report. When asked to report a situation in which they shared a

particular emotion, people may for example be more eager to report situations in which they shared an emotion for a reason that is socially desirable (e.g., warning). Second, there may be a reconstruction bias. Besides the fact that people are often not fully aware of their motivations for sharing, it may be especially difficult for people to remember in hindsight why they shared a particular experience.

Another extension of the present findings would be to directly sample experiences of specific emotions rather than investigating negative experiences in general and measuring the emotions. Sampling experiences of regret for example, might enable us to tap these experiences more accurately than sampling general negative experiences and then using the emotion ratings to assess the relationships with motivations. After all, when specifically instructed to report a particular instance of regret, people may report experiences that are more typical for regret than when they are asked to report general negative experiences. All three improvements discussed above (i.e., a broader domain of experiences, sampled more proximally, and sampling specific emotions) were adopted in the second study. Study 2.2 is a diary study in which participants report every evening whether they shared anger or regret during that day and which motivations they had for sharing.

STUDY 2.2

Method

Participants were 71 first-year psychology students (10 male, 61 female, mean age 21 years). They received course credits for participation. Every evening before going to bed, for fourteen consecutive days, participants completed a checklist on which they indicated whether they had experienced and shared anger and/or regret. In case they had, they were instructed to complete the questionnaire for the emotion they experienced. Thus each participant reported on one anger and one regret experience over a period of two weeks maximum. The experiment thus has a two-group within-subjects design. The questionnaire for the two emotions was identical. First, participants described briefly what experience evoked the negative emotion. This enabled us to check whether the participants reported the emotions we tried to capture, and it made participants to focus on the experience again. Next, as a manipulation

check, participants rated for the two target emotions (similar to Study 2.1) to what extent they were experienced right after the negative experience took place (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *very much*). Recall that anger was measured by the items frustration, irritation, and anger, and regret was measured by shame, guilt, and regret.

Next, each motivation was assessed by three items for each of which participants indicated to what extent the motivation was applicable to them when they shared the experience earlier that day on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). The motivations for sharing were assessed using the same set of 21 items that was used in Study 2.1, with only some small adaptations in case the items specifically concerned a service provider or firm.

Results and Discussion

Emotions

To check whether the experiences reported evoked the target emotions, we conducted a MANOVA with emotion condition (anger versus regret) as within-subjects factor and the emotion measures as dependent variables. This analysis showed that anger and regret are indeed experienced to a different level in the conditions $F(2,69) = 137.40$, $p < .001$. The results of the univariate tests in Table 2.3 show that the experiences reported in the anger condition evoked more anger than regret. Similarly, the experiences reported in the regret condition evoked more regret than anger.

Motivations

A MANOVA with emotion condition as within-subjects factor and the motivations as dependent variables showed that overall, anger and regret are related to different motivations for social sharing, $F(7,64) = 9.42$, $p < .001$. Univariate tests showed that five of the seven motivations differed significantly between the emotion conditions (see Table 2.3). The present results thus again support our idea that the motivations for sharing depend on the specific emotion people experience. The data showed, perfectly in line with Study 2.1 and with the predictions, that when people shared experiences of anger, they were more likely to be driven by the motivations of venting and revenge, than when they shared experiences of regret. In addition, angry people are more

likely to share because they seek support than people who experience regret. When people shared regret-evoking experiences, they were more likely to warn their interaction partner than when they shared anger. Unexpectedly, we found that experiences of regret were more often shared to entertain others than experiences of anger. Moreover, the expected relationships between regret and bonding, and between regret and advice seeking were not confirmed by the present data.

Table 2.3

Emotions and motivations for socially sharing daily emotions: Study 2.2

	Condition					
	Anger		Regret			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*F*(1,70)	*p*
Emotions						
Anger	7.75	.88	5.53	1.88	93.30	< .001
Regret	2.21	1.42	6.10	1.79	221.17	< .001
Motivations						
Venting	5.56	1.44	4.78	1.64	13.93	< .001
Support seeking	5.18	1.50	4.53	1.69	10.53	.002
Revenge	2.52	1.51	1.38	.77	32.96	< .001
Advice seeking	3.45	1.78	3.57	1.61	.28	.597
Bonding	3.25	1.91	3.56	1.82	2.12	.150
Warning	2.06	1.42	2.64	1.47	10.57	.002
Entertaining	1.49	.83	2.15	1.62	11.46	.001

General Discussion

In the present studies we found support for the idea that the motivation for people to share their emotions is dependent on the specific emotion they experience. We tested this idea in two studies in both a specific context (negative consumption experiences) and in a general context (daily negative experiences). The findings revealed that more so than regret, anger is associated with the motivations of venting their feelings, taking revenge, and seeking for support. More so than anger, regret is associated with sharing for reasons of warning, bonding, advice seeking and entertaining.

In Study 2.1, we used structural equation modeling to examine the emotions, the motivations, and the relationships between these two. In Study 2.2, we took a different approach and sampled on the emotions and measured the motivations. The findings of Study 2.2 largely correspond with those of Study 2.1. Both studies showed that anger is (more than regret) related to the motivations of venting, support seeking, and revenge. In addition, the finding that regret is more than anger related to warning the interaction partner is also consistent between the two studies. However, some findings on links between regret and specific motivations do not exactly correspond between these two studies. First, whereas Study 2.1 showed that regret is related to bonding, the scores on bonding in Study 2.2 were somewhat higher for people who shared regret than for people who shared anger, but not significantly. In a similar vein, the expected relationship between regret and advice seeking was confirmed by the results of Study 2.1, but not by the results of Study 2.2. The fact that the results of the latter study show a similar pattern might suggest that people share regret because they seek advice and because they want to strengthen their social bonds. Finally, Study 2.1 did not confirm the expected negative relationship between regret and entertaining, yet more surprisingly, the second study even shows a positive relationship between these two. Apart from the idea posed previously that mundane experiences of regret may be easier to joke about, another explanation may be that laughing about one's mistakes can be a way to cope with the negative feelings about the self, or to put the situation into perspective – two speculations that follow-up research may examine.

Our studies confirmed several of our predicted specific relationships between emotions and motivations, and disconfirmed others. Anger is related to venting, revenge, and to support seeking. These relationships were predicted from the literature on typical responses to anger (e.g., Bougie et al., 2003). Whereas literature on anger mainly concerns intense anger, the anger reported in the present study was more daily (recall that we asked for the last time people were dissatisfied by a product or firm in Study 2.1, and for something that made them angry on the same day as they completed the questionnaire in Study 2.2). Thus, the results show that people who experience everyday anger also have a desire to be supported by the knowledge that others sympathize with them and understand their feelings, to take revenge, and to ventilate their

feelings. At a more general level, when people share anger, they seem to be focused on themselves or on someone else, but not on the relationship with their interaction partner.

Regret is related to bonding, warning, advice seeking, and surprisingly also (positively) to entertaining. This supports the idea that regret may promote prosocial behavior. After all, regretful people have a tendency to warn others, despite the fact that this implies that they have to inform others about a mistake they made. Additionally, regret may make people share to improve their relationships, when they share in order to strengthen their social bonds or to entertain their interaction partner. Finally, since regret involves the feeling that one had better acted differently (Zeelenberg et al., 2000), another motivation to share this emotion is to seek advice on how to solve the situation. It is important to note that the results of Study 2.2 are based on a comparison between anger and regret. At a more absolute level, the data of Study 2.2 show that people who share their regret are also likely to vent their feelings (but significantly less than angry people). People who experience regret can thus be focused on themselves, their interaction partner, or the relationship with their interaction partner. They may be focused on themselves, on someone else or on the relationship with their interaction partner.

Theoretical and practical implications

In different situations people experience different emotions, and related to these emotions are different things that they hope to achieve by sharing with others. This finding is new evidence in line with emotion research that shows that specific emotions are different (Frijda et al., 1989; Roseman et al., 1994), that emotions are linked to core social motives (Zurbriggen & Sturman, 2002), and that different emotions are related to different behavior (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2006). Whereas the other evidence on emotion-specificity concentrated on emotional experiences in general, ours is the first study to establish it in the specific context of social sharing.

The present data contribute to literature on social sharing as well. Studies on social sharing have increased insights about the phenomenology of the process and about with whom, how soon and how often people share. Those studies also consistently found that emotions do not differ with regard to these

measures, apart from the findings that people wait somewhat longer to share shame and guilt (Rimé et al., 1991, 1992, 1998), and that instances of shame are less often shared with parents than instances of fear and sadness (Singh-Manoux & Finkenauer, 2001). In the present research, we went beyond the observable aspects of social sharing, and found that sharing differs for emotions with regard to an unobservable aspect, namely the motivations. Thus, although previous research generally has not found emotion-specific differences for social sharing, sharing clearly differs for different emotions, but with regard to several notably other aspects than commonly assumed.

Our results also shed another light on the belief of the majority of people that it is beneficial to share emotions (Zech, 1998). The present data show that people can have various motivations for sharing. Whether sharing a particular experience will be beneficial thus depends on whether the outcome corresponds with the goal that someone had in mind. The motivations for sharing depend on the specific emotion experienced, thus a particular outcome may be beneficial when sharing some emotions, but not necessarily when sharing others. For example, when people share their anger because they want to take revenge on the person they perceive as responsible for the negative situation, they may feel better when their interaction partner expresses hostility towards the responsible person. However, when people receive such a response when they share their regret because they want to show their interaction partner that he or she is important to them, they may not feel better at all after sharing (see Chapter 4 for studies that examine these predictions).

Besides theoretical implications, the current findings may also have practical implications. The finding that anger is related to venting and revenge corresponds to the ideas commonly held about angry people. It is a widely accepted belief that it is good to let anger out, and angry people sometimes feel the tendency to retaliate on the source of their anger. However, the data of the present research revealed that anger is also related to the motivation of support seeking. In other words, besides the active goals of venting and revenge, angry people can also be in desire for support. Realizing this implies that it can be helpful to support friends when they are angry, instead of merely stimulating them to let their anger out.

In a similar vein, realizing that people may share their regret because they want to strengthen their social bonds may be helpful in comforting friends or relatives who experience regret. Experiencing regret means that people feel that they made a mistake. Although stressing social bonds may not help to decrease the regret that people experience, it may help them to increase other positive feelings about themselves. Thus, there are more ways we can respond to people who share regret, rather than merely trying to take their regret away.

Future research

The current studies and findings suggest various avenues for future research. Here we focused on two specific emotions: anger and regret. Follow-up research could concentrate on a broader range of specific emotions. For example, do anger and fear differ with regard to the motivations for sharing they are connected to, or to which motivations is sadness related? Although we provided first evidence that it makes sense to discriminate among emotions when investigating social sharing, investigating specific emotions provides a more detailed and precise insight into the effects of the different specific emotions. In Chapter 3, the motivations for sharing will be investigated for a broader range of negative emotions.

Another avenue for future research is to investigate the consequences of social sharing. Social sharing research has tested whether it is beneficial for people to share their emotions with others by comparing the impact of the emotional memory before and after sharing (Rimé et al., 1991, 1992, 1998). From the present findings we learn that when investigating the potential beneficial effects of social sharing, it may also be interesting to study the motivations for sharing. As we have seen however, people can share for various motivations, and research has not yet taken these motivations for sharing into account. Because social sharing is an interaction, there are also various different responses that people may receive when they socially share their emotions with others. Insight into the responses that people receive would allow us to compare these responses to the motivations that people have when they share specific emotions. In this way, future research can investigate whether people accomplished what they wanted, and the (beneficial) effects of sharing can be studied.

To investigate emotion-specificity in social sharing we compared two emotions that were distinct with regard to the appraisal dimension of responsibility. The comparison between anger and regret yielded first evidence that specific emotions are related to specific motivations for sharing. Clearly, there are more dimensions along which emotions can be categorized (Roseman & Smith, 2001; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Based on the current findings, we expect that comparing emotions on those different dimensions may result in novel insights into emotion-motivation linkages. For example, research could focus on the dimension of certainty. Two emotions that are clearly distinguished by this dimension are anger (certain) and uncertainty (uncertain). Based on the present findings, we expect that people who share uncertainty have other motivations for sharing than people who share anger (e.g., revenge will not be a motivations for sharing uncertainty, since experiencing uncertainty implies that people do not exactly understand what happened or why). In the next chapter, we elaborate on the findings of the current chapter by investigating for a broader range of negative emotions whether emotion-specificity exists with regard to goals for social sharing.

Chapter 3

"Never Eat in That Restaurant, I Did!" On Why People Engage in Sharing Negative Consumption Experiences[3]

Chapter 2 showed that emotion-specificity matters in social sharing. Now we broaden this insight by investigating the emotion-motivation link in social sharing for a broader range of negative emotions. In addition, instead of measuring the negative emotions, the studies presented in this chapter directly sample experiences of a specific emotion they evoked. That is, rather than instructing participants to recall a general negative emotion and use their ratings of specific emotions, participants are instructed to recall an experience that evoked a particular emotion. The focus is again on the more restricted domain of negative consumption experiences, as in Study 2.1, to investigate situations that are as homogenously as possible besides the specific emotion they evoked.

Consumers frequently talk to other consumers about their consumption experiences. In marketing terms, this phenomenon is called 'word-of-mouth communication'. There is increasing insight into the antecedents of word-of-mouth communication – factors influencing whether or to what extent dissatisfied consumers engage in communication about their negative experience. For example, the amount of sharing consumers engage in depends on perceived justice (Blodgett, Granbois, & Walters, 1993), and on the severity of the problem (Richins, 1983). Despite the insights gained on the antecedents of sharing negative consumption experiences, surprisingly little is known about the *motivations* for sharing negative consumption experiences, that is, what people want to achieve by it.

Moreover, affect has received very little attention in research on sharing negative consumption experiences. Quite some progress has been made since Westbrook (1987, p. 258) concluded that: "Affect in post-purchase processes

[3] This chapter is based on Wetzer, Zeelenberg & Pieters (2006e)

has been relatively neglected". To gauge the progress made thus far, a literature search was conducted on the Web of Knowledge and JSTOR search engines (in October 2005). The search terms used were 'word-of-mouth and emo*', 'consumption emo* and responses', and 'word-of-mouth and affect'. The abstracts were read carefully, which resulted in seven papers that related word-of-mouth to specific emotions (beyond general dissatisfaction) (Bougie et al., 2003; Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003; Dubé & Maute, 1996; Maute & Dubé, 1999; Nyer, 1997; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999, 2004). Interestingly, all this research has focused on whether some specific emotions are more likely to lead to word-of-mouth than other emotions, but not on whether certain aspects of word-of-mouth (such as its underlying goal) differ for different emotions, which the current research aims to explore.

Next, a more systematic review was conducted of all papers published in a selection of journals on consumer behavior (*Journal of Consumer Psychology, Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research, Marketing Science, and Psychology & Marketing)* over the past 20 years. This exercise revealed that affective antecedents of word-of-mouth have only scarcely received attention. Of the 23 papers on word-of-mouth, 9 focused on its consequences, 12 focused on its antecedents, and 2 on a mixture between these two. Of these 14 papers studying antecedents, 8 were concerned with non-affective antecedents such as personality traits or situational variables (e.g., Söderlund, 2002; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999). Only four papers were about affective antecedents (Bowman & Narayandas, 2001; Eliashberg, Jonker, Sawhney, & Wierenga, 2000; Mooradian & Olver, 1997; Westbrook, 1987). However, these four papers all concentrated on general affect (such as overall satisfaction). Thus, although the relevance of distinguishing among specific emotions has been acknowledged in previous emotion research, this has not yet been applied to sharing negative consumption experiences.

In accordance with the emotion-specific approach of emotions (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2006), the few available studies on emotions in consumer behavior support that the *specific emotion* experienced by consumers affects their subsequent behaviors, including sharing negative consumption experiences. For example, anger was found to be a predictor of sharing, whereas sadness was not (Nyer, 1997). In fact, when controlling for anger, dissatisfaction was

found to be unrelated to sharing (Bougie et al., 2003). Distinguishing among specific emotions when studying the sharing of negative consumption experiences thus seems to be useful. The present research builds on this and on the findings of Chapter 2, and explores whether and how the motivations for socially sharing negative consumption experiences differ for specific emotions.

This investigation extends the word-of-mouth literature by integrating it with the emerging stream of social psychological research on the social sharing of emotions (e.g., Rimé et al., 1991), which has concentrated on the sender of the message. Another potential contribution of the present research may stem from the connection between motivations and emotions. Emotions are linked to actions, but do not always actually lead to these actions because various aspects (such as acceptability of the action) may moderate this connection (Frijda, 2004). The link between emotions and motivations does not suffer from this interference. Consequently, studying motivations may provide more insight into the potential differential influence of different emotions on subsequent behavior.

The idea that specific emotions are related to specific motivations is also in line with recent research on coping with negative emotions in purchase-related situations. Yi and Baumgartner (2004) asked participants to recall a situation in which they experienced a particular negative emotion: disappointment, anger, regret, or worry, and to indicate for seven different coping strategies to what extent they had been used. Their results showed that different emotions are related to different coping strategies such as "confrontive" coping, mental disengagement, and acceptance. These results support the idea that different emotions are related to different motivations, but in a different (and more general) context, namely coping with emotions. The present research examines the emotion-motivation link in more detail, and across a wide range of emotions, based on emerging theorizing in social sharing research.

The motivations investigated in the present chapter are the same as in Chapter 2, with one extension – self-presentation as motive is added. After all, people may talk about the products or services they use in order to impress others (for example, by complaining about the bad service provided by their Ferrari-dealer, they may try to impress others by letting them know that they drive a

Ferrari). The motivations included in the present chapter are thus: (a) Venting, that is blowing off steam by expressing the emotion; (b) Support search, that is seeking comfort, moral support or understanding, a well known emotion regulation strategy; (c) Revenge, that is behavior that is performed to harm someone else, in response to feeling of being harmed by that person; (d) Advice search, that is sharing in order to gain cognitive clarity; (e) Bonding, that is decreasing interpersonal distance and strengthening social bonds; (f) Warning, that is helping the receiver make a satisfying purchase decision; (g) Entertaining, that is keeping a conversation going and amusing the conversational partner; (h) Self-presentation, that is managing another's impression, or image of oneself. Let us now turn to the specific emotions that may be related to these motivations for sharing negative consumption experiences.

The first step in examining the link between specific emotions and specific motivations for sharing consumption experiences is to look at which specific emotions are most relevant in these situations. Some of these emotions involved in negative consumption experiences have been studied previously, such as regret (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999, 2004), anger (Bougie et al., 2003; Dubé & Maute, 1996; Maute & Dubé, 1999; Nyer, 1997), and surprise/worry (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003; Maute & Dubé, 1999). Because these are not the only negative emotions, the inclusion of lesser-explored emotions for sharing negative consumption experiences is examined first.

Overview of the current research

Study 3.1 explores which specific emotions play a role in situations in which people share their negative consumption experiences. An additional aim of Study 3.1 is to look at specific characteristics of sharing negative consumption experiences, such as with whom and how soon people share these. The results from Study 3.1 and previous literature reveal that anger, frustration, irritation, regret, disappointment, and uncertainty are emotions that are particularly relevant in shared negative consumption situations. Study 3.2 aims to discover whether these specific emotions are related to different motivations to these experiences.

STUDY 3.1

Method

One hundred students (40 males, 60 females, mean age 22) participated voluntarily. They recalled a specific personal episode, and responded to open and closed-ended questions concerning this episode, following the lead in basic emotion research (e.g., Rimé et al., 1991; Roseman et al., 1994). More specifically, participants were asked to give a written description of the last time they had shared a dissatisfying consumption experience. Next, the participants answered several questions about the specific characteristics of the situation: They indicated first how long ago this negative consumption experience had taken place. The next questions were closed-ended and addressed with whom they had shared their negative experience the first time (partner/spouse, relative, close friend, acquaintance, colleague or stranger), and how soon after the negative experience they had shared it for the first time (within one hour, within half a day, within one day, within one week, or later). Next, participants rated the content of their story (-5 = *very negative*, +5 = *very positive*), and indicated how often they had talked about their experience in total (once, several times with the same person, several times with different persons, or many times). The emotions relevant in negative consumption situations were assessed in two ways: First, via an open-ended question asking for the emotion experienced most strongly after the negative event, second, via rating how intense 17 emotions were experienced (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *very much*).

Results and Discussion

Reported negative experiences

Participants reported a wide variety of negative experiences. Examples of reported services are restaurants, banking, internet, insurance, hospitals and public transportation. Examples of products reported are televisions, clothing items, cars, body lotion and furniture. On average, the reported experience had taken place about 3 months before the study, with no differences between products and services.

To whom and when the negative consumption experience was communicated first

In line with the social sharing literature, people shared their negative consumption experiences far more with intimates than with non-intimates, and fairly quickly after the event had occurred (Rimé et al., 1991). Of the 100 participants, 22 shared their experience first with their partner/spouse, 39 with a relative, 22 with a close friend, 8 with an acquaintance, 8 with a colleague, and only 1 with a stranger. Of the 100 participants, 54 shared their experience for the first time within one hour, 20 shared within half a day, 16 within one day, 8 within one week, and only 2 shared after one week. Thus, negative consumption experiences are shared fast, and faster than negative events in general (Rimé et al., 1991). In line with research on social sharing, the conversation partner and the delay of sharing appeared not to differ between different emotions. Clearly, the communication had on average a negative content, M = -2.71, SD = 1.58, on a scale ranging from –5 (*very negative*) to +5 (*very positive*), and the majority of participants (N = 67) shared the experience several times with several persons, which is again consistent with findings on social sharing. The main goal of the present study was however to explore which emotions are felt after a negative consumption experience.

Emotions felt after a negative consumption experience

To the open-ended question which emotion was experienced most strongly after the negative experience, the emotions mentioned most often were anger, irritation, disappointment, dissatisfaction, frustration, indignation, and hate (see Table 3.1). The remaining emotions (such as shame and surprise) were mentioned less than five times. Participants also indicated for 17 emotions the extent to which they were experienced. As Table 3.1 shows, dissatisfaction, irritation, disappointment, anger, and frustration had the highest average scores. Combining these results, the present study suggests with two different measures that the emotions relevant when people share negative consumption situations are: anger, irritation, disappointment, dissatisfaction, and frustration.

Table 3.1

Emotions experienced after a negative consumption experience: Study 3.1

Emotion	Mean	SD	Self reported number
Anger	5.90	2.61	29
Irritation	6.66	2.38	16
Disappointment	5.95	2.34	11
Dissatisfaction	7.39	1.79	9
Frustration	5.29	2.86	7
Hate	2.98	2.76	5
Indignation	-	-	5
Regret	3.27	2.76	3
Bewilderment	-	-	3
Surprise	-	-	3
Shame	1.62	1.41	1
Sadness	2.21	1.98	0
Guilt	1.40	.95	0
Resentment	2.55	2.41	0
Envy	2.02	2.15	0
Fear	1.19	.87	0
Disgust	2.88	2.50	0

Note. Entries are means and sd's to the question 'To what extent did you experience the following emotion' on 9-point scales ranging from *not at all* (1) to *very much* (9). Entries in the 'Self report' column are the number of participants who reported to have experienced this particular emotion to the open ended question 'Which emotion did you experience most strongly after the negative consumption experience?'. Emotions that were only mentioned once (and that were not assessed by the close-ended question) are not included in the table. N = 100.

STUDY 3.2

Study 3.2 explores potential links between specific emotions and specific motivations for socially sharing negative consumption experiences. To achieve this, emotions are incorporated that are relevant in these situations, but that are also different enough to be connected to different motivations. Study 3.1 revealed that anger, frustration and irritation are among the relevant emotions. Anger is defined as an emotion that occurs when a negative experience "is occasioned by the actions of another person, actions which are

appraised by the angry individual as unjustified or at least avoidable" (Averill, 1982, p. 129). Frustration occurs when events are "obstructive for goal attainment, by putting goal or need satisfaction out of reach, delaying its attainment, or requiring additional effort" (Scherer, 2001, p. 96). Irritation (also called 'cold anger') differs from anger because it is less intense (Banse & Scherer, 1996), and it is also related to some different appraisals such as suddenness and familiarity (Scherer, 2001). Although literature does not provide a clear definition of this emotion, it is included in Study 3.2 because it was the second most frequently mentioned emotion by participants in Study 3.1.

Clearly, these three emotions – anger, frustration, and irritation – are conceptually and empirically related (see Studies 2.1 and 2.2). They are relatively similar when compared to other negatively valenced emotions. However, some evidence in emotion literature, reviewed below, indicates that they may be potentially different in their behavioral implications, and to explore this all these emotions are included in Study 3.2. First, irritation, frustration and anger all belong to the same emotion cluster, but they belong to a different subcategory (Shaver et al., 1987). Second, anger and frustration are differentiated by their focus: Angry people focus on the blameworthy action of someone else, whereas frustrated people focus on the negative outcome (Clore, Ortony, Dienes, & Fujita, 1993). Moreover, in frustration, the negative event is seen as circumstantially-caused, whereas with anger, the negative event is seen as caused by others (Roseman & Smith, 2001). Third, in a study on various ways to retaliate, people who engaged in word-of-mouth in order to retaliate experienced more irritation than anger (Huefner & Hunt, 2000). This suggests that these emotions are not identical, and that irritation is a relevant emotion for sharing negative consumption experiences.

In addition, dissatisfaction and disappointment play a role in negative consumption situations. Dissatisfaction is not included because it expresses the more general valence of a reaction, instead of a specific emotion (Bougie et al., 2003). Disappointment is defined as an emotion that "is primarily experienced in a situation in which something positive was expected but did not occur" (Van Dijk, Zeelenberg, & Van der Pligt, 1999, p. 131) and is included in Study 3.2.

Two specific emotions known to be relevant in word-of-mouth communication, regret and uncertainty, are also included in Study 3.2. Regret is defined as "a negative, cognitively based emotion that is experienced when realizing or imagining that our present situation would have been better, had we acted differently" (Zeelenberg et al., 2000). Regret differs from disappointment in various aspects such as antecedent conditions, appraisal patterns and phenomenology. More specifically, regret occurs when someone feels responsible for a negative event, whereas disappointment results from unexpected negative events that were caused by someone else or by uncontrollable circumstances. Finally, uncertainty is related to worry, which is related to word-of-mouth communication (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003). Emotional experiences of uncertainty are included to Study 3.2. Uncertainty refers to situations in which people are unsure about how to interpret the situation and how to respond. Uncertainty is included because it is relevant in negative word-of-mouth situations and it is substantially different from the other emotions included in Study 3.2.

In conclusion: Based on Study 3.1 and previous research, the following emotions were included in Study 3.2: Anger, irritation, frustration, disappointment, regret, and uncertainty. The next step is to link these specific emotions to specific motivations to share these experiences. More specifically, for each emotion under interest it is explored to which of the following motivations for sharing it is related: venting, support search, revenge, advice search, bonding, warning, entertaining, and self-presentation.

For most emotions, the relationships with motivations are explored. Based on Chapter 2 and previous literature, some relations seem more likely than others. For example, catharsis theory (Breuer & Freud, 1955) states that people should let anger out, because otherwise it builds up to a more dangerous explosion. A typical behavior that promotes letting anger out is venting, thus it may be argued that anger is related to venting. In addition, emotion literature shows that the characteristic emotivational goal of anger is 'to hurt' (Roseman et al., 1994). For the specific situation of sharing negative consumption experiences, an utterance of this goal may be revenge, in which case sharing is used to hurt a firm. Thus, anger could be related to revenge. In addition, frustration could be related to revenge. As mentioned previously, frustration involves blocking of a goal (Scherer, 2001). In turn, barriers to goal

attainment can activate an instigation to aggression (Berkowitz, 1989). Clearly, revenge is the most aggressive goal for sharing. In addition, when experiencing regret, people feel responsible for the negative event (Zeelenberg et al., 2000). This results in a negative feeling about oneself, which can induce a tendency to stress the social bonds with others to reduce this negative feeling. This may suggest that a relationship could exist between regret and bonding. Regret also involves a feeling of having made a bad choice (Zeelenberg et al., 2000). Even when their own choice can not be reversed anymore, people can prevent others from making similar mistakes. Therefore, a relation between regret and warning others for making a similar bad choice could be expected. Finally, when people are worried, they are likely to use a more proactive, problem-focused coping strategy (Yi & Baumgartner, 2004). The goal in the present study that is most problem-focused in the case of uncertainty is advice search, and therefore uncertainty may be related to advice search. After all, receiving advice may reduce uncertainty.

Method

One hundred and ninety-eight students (32 males, 166 females, mean age 20) completed a questionnaire individually as a part of a set of paper-and-pencil tests in exchange for course credit. They were randomly assigned to one of six conditions (anger, frustration, irritation, disappointment, regret, or uncertainty) in a one-factorial six-group design. They read an introduction about negative consumption experiences involving the target emotion. Next, they described the last time they shared a consumption experience involving this emotion, and indicated when it had taken place. Each motivation was assessed by three items (see Appendix).

Results

In order to test the idea that motivations for sharing negative consumption experiences are different for different emotions, first the relations suggested by previous research were tested by means of contrast analyses. The mean scores on the motivations per emotion condition are represented in Table 3.2. The results revealed that experiences of anger scored higher on venting than other emotions, $t(192) = 2.48$, $p < .05$. In addition, participants who had reported an experience involving anger or frustration were more likely to share for taking

revenge than participants in the other emotion conditions, $t(192) = 2.67$, $p < .01$. Moreover, although participants who recalled an experience of regret scored higher on bonding than other participants, this difference was not significant, $t(192) = 1.76$, ns. The idea that regret was related to warning was also not supported, $t(192) = .84$, ns, which will be discussed in the discussion section of this study. Finally, experiences of uncertainty scored higher on advice search, $t(192) = 2.61$, $p < .05$.

To further discover the relationships and the differences between the various emotions and goals, a multiple discriminant analysis (MDA) was conducted. MDA differentiates among *a priori* defined groups, here the specific emotions, based on a set of dependent variables, here the motivations for sharing (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). The results can be summarized graphically in a plot of differences between-groups in variable space. The six-group MDA with the eight goals as discriminating variables resulted in five discriminant functions. The first two discriminant functions were significant and were therefore used for further analyses. These two functions (eigenvalues .226 and .157) together explained 83.6% of the variance. The overall fit of the retained discriminant functions was tested by assessing group membership prediction accuracy. This test revealed that the discriminant functions predict well (Press's $Q = 24.58$, $p < .01$).

Figure 3.1 is a graphical representation in a two-dimensional space of the motivations loading on the discriminant functions. The emotion conditions can also be plotted in the figure by calculating their coordinates on the discriminant functions. The coordinates of the emotions and motivations are represented in Table 3.3, which also describes how these coordinates were obtained. The squares represent the positions of the emotion conditions, and the arrows represent the goals. The length of an arrow is indicative of its relative importance in discriminating among the emotions, and the arrow points to the emotion for which the motivation is most applicable. The relevance of a certain motivation for distinguishing an emotion from others can be assessed by drawing a perpendicular line from an emotion to the arrow of a motivation, or its final direction. The shorter this line, the more relevant the motivation is for distinguishing the emotion from the others (Hair et al., 1998).

Table 3.2

Mean scores (standard deviations in parentheses) of motivations per emotion condition: Study 3.2

	Emotion Condition					
Motivation	Anger	Regret	Frustration	Disappointment	Irritation	Uncertainty
Venting	5.43 (.99)	4.53 (1.65)	4.92 (1.42)	4.58 (1.72)	4.92 (1.40)	4.73 (1.55)
Support search	4.15 (1.33)	3.78 (1.67)	3.81 (1.52)	4.09 (1.64)	3.54 (1.59)	4.40 (1.38)
Revenge	3.26 (1.63)	2.65 (1.84)	3.58 (1.70)	2.60 (1.51)	3.25 (1.69)	2.53 (1.50)
Advice search	2.85 (1.16)	3.07 (1.38)	2.85 (1.26)	2.80 (1.18)	2.48 (1.29)	3.44 (1.28)
Bonding	2.14 (1.12)	2.60 (1.47)	1.91 (1.07)	2.32 (1.07)	2.03 (1.21)	2.19 (1.29)
Warning	2.97 (1.46)	3.20 (1.68)	2.57 (1.28)	3.15 (1.40)	2.98 (1.64)	3.16 (1.34)
Entertaining	1.99 (1.08)	2.72 (1.86)	2.33 (1.50)	3.03 (1.78)	2.44 (1.37)	2.53 (1.62)
Self-presentation	1.46 (.73)	1.27 (.44)	1.43 (.54)	1.76 (.77)	1.34 (.76)	1.82 (1.06)

Note. Values could range from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).

Table 3.3

Coordinates of emotions and motivations in MDA-space: Study 3.2

	Function 1	Function 2
Anger	-3.05	1.01
Regret	2.59	-4.35
Frustration	-4.78	.61
Disappointment	3.72	.53
Irritation	-3.54	-1.59
Uncertainty	5.02	3.80
Venting	-.84	.12
Support search	.60	.44
Revenge	-1.76	-.02
Advice search	.51	.64
Bonding	.30	-1.09
Warning	.27	-.09
Entertain	.24	-.70
Self-presentation	.43	3.00

Note. The coordinates of the emotion conditions were obtained by multiplying the group centroids by the approximate *F* value associated with each discriminant function. The coordinates of a motivation were obtained by multiplying the discriminant loading (after rotation) by its respective univariate *F* value.

Inspection of Figure 3.1 reveals the structure in the different motivations for sharing negative consumption experiences. For the first dimension (displayed by the horizontal axis), the most important motivations seem to be revenge and venting on the left, versus support search, advice search and self-presentation on the right. This dimension may be interpreted as destructive versus constructive. Note that the *relative* positions of the motivations in the discriminant space are the crucial information here. Revenge can thus be considered as more destructive relative to the other motivations, not necessarily extremely destructive in an absolute sense. The vertical axis displays the second discriminant function. The motivations most important for this function seem to be self-presentation, support search and advice search, bonding and entertaining. This dimension may be interpreted as self-focused versus other-focused, with self-presentation at the self-focused side.

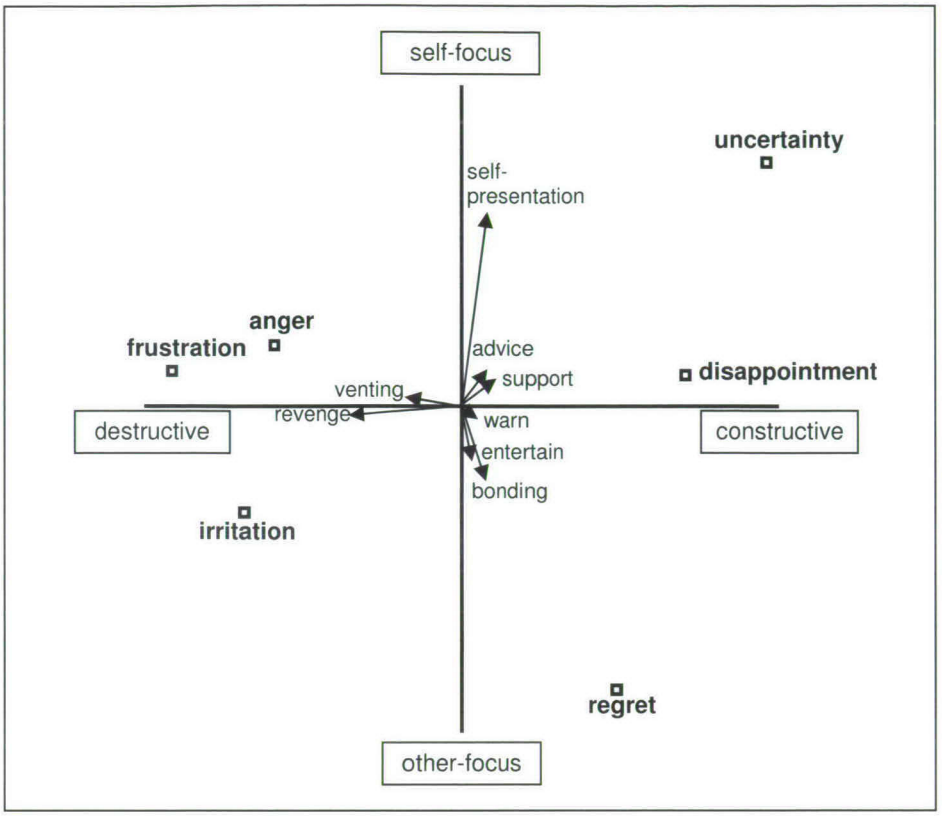

Figure 3.1

Motivations for sharing negative consumption experiences, and their specific emotions (printed in boldface) in multiple discriminant space: Study 3.2

These results reveal how the motivations for socially sharing negative consumption experiences can be classified according to their focus (other – self) and their intention (destructive – constructive). It appears that classifying the emotions on these dimensions also results in a distinction as revealed by their positions in different quadrants in Figure 3.1. For interpretation of the emotions in the figure, note that not the emotion in itself is destructive versus constructive, rather, the motivations most strongly associated with which talking about the emotion are destructive versus constructive. This finding that emotions as well as motivations can be distinguished on two dimensions provides empirical support for the idea that different emotions are intimately tied to different motivations for sharing, and that a simple two-dimensional structure captures much of the differences.

The relationships that could be logically expected on the basis of previous research were further explored by looking at the specific links between emotions and motivations for sharing shown in Figure 3.1. The MDA revealed various relationships between emotions and motivations. Participants who experienced regret seemed to distinguish themselves from others because they were more likely to share for reasons of bonding and warning. Interestingly, regret was also related to entertaining. This might be explained by the fact that laughing about one's mistakes can be a way to cope with negative feelings about oneself. The MDA revealed that disappointment was related to support search, advice search and warning. Disappointment is experienced when expectancies are disconfirmed. This feeling may result in the need to prevent others from having the same expectancies as they had by warning them. A possible explanation for the relation between disappointment and advice search and support search may be that when expectancies are not met, people may search for advice on how to evaluate whether their expectancies were correct. In some cases their expectancies were correct, however, and people can do little else than search for support. Uncertainty seemed to be related to advice search, anger seemed to be related to venting and revenge, and frustration appeared to be related to revenge. In addition, uncertainty seemed to be related to support search, frustration seemed to relate to venting, and irritation related to revenge and venting as well.

Discussion

These results revealed the connections between specific emotions and specific motivations for social sharing. Although differences between emotions with regard to motivations were found, some emotions were less distinct. Especially anger, frustration, and irritation, although belonging to a different subcategory of the emotion prototype of anger (Shaver et al., 1987), did not differ remarkably on the goals in the present study. These three emotions all play a role in negative consumption situations according to Study 3.1, but they are conceptually very closely related, which has also been revealed by present study. However, it must be noted that, although anger, irritation and frustration are not strongly different with regard to the motivations for sharing, they seem to differ considerably from other emotions.

The results were also supportive of some specific expectations about connections between goals and emotions. One expectation is only partially supported by the data: The connection between regret and warning is supported when plotting regret in the multiple discriminant space, but the contrast analyses showed that people in the regret condition did not score significantly higher on warning than people in the other conditions. The reason for this may lie in the fact that besides people who experienced regret, people who experienced disappointment and uncertainty scored high on warning as well. This was not predicted, but it can be explained by the earlier mentioned fact that disappointment involves disconfirmed expectancies, which may evoke the desire to prevent others from having the same expectancies by warning them. This does however not explain the relatively high scores of people in the uncertainty condition.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present studies present an investigation of the relations between consumer emotions and motivations for sharing these emotions. The results are in line with the results of Chapter 2 and reveal that the specific motivations that people have for sharing negative consumption experiences are related to different specific emotions that are evoked by these experiences. Specifically, experiences of anger, frustration, and irritation seem to be related to sharing driven by motivations of venting and taking revenge. Sharing after regret seems to be associated with motivations concerning bonding, entertaining and warning. Experiences of disappointment seem to relate to sharing in order to search for support, search for advice, or warning. Finally, sharing after uncertainty seems to be related to support search and advice search. Moreover, the data revealed that the motivations for sharing can be classified on two dimensions, namely destructive versus constructive, and self-focused versus other-focused.

The present findings provide further evidence for the idea that social sharing can be conceived of as an emotion-specific phenomenon. As noted before, social sharing research has concentrated on with whom, how soon and how often people share, and consistently found that emotions hardly differ with regard to these measures, apart from some exceptions, such as that people share anger and fear sooner than other emotions, and that they share shame

with a more restricted range of people (Rimé et al., 1991, 1992, 1998). The research presented in the current and the previous chapter extends the existing literature by providing additional evidence for the notion that emotions differ with regard to social sharing. Clearly, the results obtained in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 are supportive of the idea that specific emotions are linked to specific motivations for sharing. Integrating the findings of these two chapters also allows for a comparison of the results on the specific relationships between anger, regret, and the motivations they are connected to. In both chapters, anger was clearly related to the motivations of venting and revenge. This is in line with the expectations based on previous research and literature on these emotions. In a similar vein, both chapters confirmed the expected relationships between regret and the motivations of warning, entertaining, and bonding. Replication of the relationships that were found in Chapter 2 provides evidence for their robustness.

Two relationships that were found in Chapter 2 were not confirmed in Chapter 3, where more emotions were incorporated. First, the relationship between regret and advice search that was found in Chapter 2 was not found in Chapter 3. An explanation for this may be that in Chapter 3, uncertainty was also included. In Chapter 2, only anger and regret were tested. Since regret is the only emotion in which people experience a threat to themselves, advice search was more related to regret than to anger. However, when uncertainty is included as well, it may, more than regret, be related to advice search. Uncertain people clearly search for cognitive clarity, which can be achieved by means of advice search. This strong connection between uncertainty and advice search may make the link between regret and advice search less important. Second, the relationship found in Chapter 2 between anger and support search was not found in Chapter 3. Rather, in Chapter 3, support search was more related to disappointment and uncertainty. Probably the relationship of support search with the emotions disappointment and uncertainty is stronger than the relationship between support search and anger. As a result of integrating these emotions in Study 3.2, the relationship between anger and support search may have become less important.

The findings of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 may also raise questions about the role of the response to social sharing. After all, social sharing is an interaction, which implies that besides the source (the person communicating his/her

negative experience), there is another person involved (the responder). The majority of the motivations for sharing require a specific response from the responder. Insight into the response that people receive to social sharing enables us to investigate whether people achieved what they wanted by sharing by comparing the motivation for sharing with the response that is received. Christophe and Rimé (1997) provided first insights in responses to social sharing. They showed that people respond to social sharing by verbal manifestations, de-dramatizing, social support, concrete action, and nonverbal comforting using a method similar to that in the present study. Luminet et al. (2000), in their experiment on social sharing, found that typical responses to sharing were 'requesting information', and 'expressing feelings'. What remains to be seen is how these responses influence the source. This will be investigated in the next chapter.

But to return to the question that motivated the research presented in this chapter, people's motivations to share their emotions seem to differ for different specific emotions. This research extends the literature on word-of-mouth communication by revealing which emotions are relevant in the specific situation of word-of-mouth. It extends social sharing research by showing which motivations are associated with specific emotions. In addition, the present study adds to the social sharing literature by showing that sharing differs across emotions with regard to the goals that people want to achieve with it. After all, why we share depends on how we feel.

Appendix

Items assessing goals in Study 3.2

Participants indicated for each item how applicable it was in the situation they described, on a 7-point scale from *not applicable at all* (1) to *fully applicable* (7).

Support search (α = .82):	I searched for comfort. I wanted to feel that someone understood me. I wanted a feeling of sympathy.
Venting (α = .80):	I wanted to pour my heart out. I had to blow off steam. I wanted to vent my feelings.
Advice search (α = .80):	I wanted to understand what happened. I wanted to know whether I judged the situation right. I wanted advice on how to handle my feelings.
Bonding (α = .86):	I wanted to strengthen the bond with my conversation partner. By talking about my emotions, I hoped to come closer to my conversation partner. By being open I wanted to let my conversation partner know that he/she is important to me.
Entertaining (α = .90):	It was a nice story to tell. I wanted to make others laugh. I liked talking about this blunder.
Self-presentation (α = .85):	I wanted to impress my conversation partner. Actually, I wanted to tell that I use this product/service. Saying that you use this product makes a good impression.

Helping receiver (α = .76):	I wanted to help my conversation partner with making a decision. I wanted to prevent my conversation partner from making the same mistake as I did. I wanted to warn my conversation partner not to use this product/service.
Revenge (α = .91):	I wanted to take revenge on the person responsible for this product/service. I wanted to give this product/service provider a bad reputation. I wanted the product/service provider to lose customers.

Chapter 4

Consequences of Socially Sharing Emotions: Testing the Emotion-Response Congruency Hypothesis[4]

Intriguingly, although sharing negative emotions redirects one's attention to the negative experience, people still choose to share these experiences all the time (e.g., Rimé et al., 1991) and thus re-experience the accompanying aversive emotions. The deliberate character of sharing negative emotions suggests that this behavior has positive consequences. Why else would people retrieve negative experiences from memory and re-iterate them? Although the social sharing of emotions may have multiple beneficial effects, empirical findings concerning these benefits are as yet inconclusive. On the one hand, some research suggests that talking reduces the frequency and impact of intrusive thoughts (Lepore, Ragan, & Jones, 2000). On the other hand, social sharing often does not lead to emotional recovery (which is the difference between the present disruptiveness and the original disruptiveness) (for an overview, see Rimé et al., 1998). Moreover, previous research has found that various other aspects of well-being are also not affected by social sharing. For example, recalling shared emotional experiences was not associated with a lower intensity of emotions than recalling emotional experiences that were kept secret (Finkenauer & Rimé, 1998). In a similar vein, a review of research on the impact of sharing emotions in bereavement showed that social sharing did not facilitate adjustment to loss in bereavement (Stroebe et al., 2005).

In the present research, we focus on the effects of sharing on the evaluations of the self and the interaction partner, thus stressing the important social nature of social sharing. In addition, we move beyond merely investigating whether sharing yields particular consequences, and focus on the interaction that takes place when people share their emotions. Thus when investigating the consequences of social sharing, we take into account the response that is received by people who share their emotion. We propose that a crucial

[4] This chapter is based on Wetzer, Zeelenberg & Pieters (in press)

determinant of the consequences of sharing emotions is the congruency between the emotion shared and the response provided by the other person involved in the interaction (i.e., the emotion-response congruency). For example, when people experience regret and share this, they may feel better when their interaction partner de-dramatizes the negative situation (e.g., "come on, it is not that bad"). The same de-dramatizing response, however, may fail to result in positive effects when it is provided to people who experience anger. We believe that the response that people receive plays an important role in determining the consequences of sharing, and importantly that the effects of a particular response may be different when it is provided to people who share different emotions.

We test this emotion-response congruency hypothesis in the present research. This extends the social sharing literature by taking on board the response that people receive when they share their emotions, by distinguishing among different emotions rather than investigating general negative valence states, and by focusing on consequences of social sharing that have not been tested previously – self-evaluation and other-evaluation. In the remainder of this introduction, we first elaborate on the emotion-response congruency hypothesis, and next describe the specific emotions focused upon in the present research.

The Emotion-Response Congruency Hypothesis

Little is known about the impact of the response that the sources receive from their interaction partners. This is surprising because social sharing is by its very nature a social interaction, and the consequences of sharing are therefore most likely to depend on the response that is received. There are various ways in which responders can react to sources, for example by giving advice, de-dramatizing the situation, or confirming the source. Each of these responses may have distinct effects on how sources feel after sharing. Although it seems reasonable to assume that some responses are more preferred or more helpful overall than others, we argue that the effects of a particular response are conditional upon its congruency with the action tendencies of the specific emotion that sources share. To make this clear, let us first describe how we conceptualize 'emotion'.

We propose that to understand the implications of the response received during socially sharing emotions, one needs to focus on the action tendencies of specific emotions. When experiencing a particular emotion, people are prepared for a particular mode of action (Frijda et al., 1989). Along these lines, when people share a specific emotion, they may be ready for a specific mode of action. For example, when people share anger they may feel the need to talk negatively about the cause of their anger in order to hurt the other. However, when people share regret, they may feel the need to strengthen their social bonds in order to buffer their self-evaluations. The response that people desire from their interaction partner may thus be dependent on the emotion they experience. This would imply that the effect of a particular response to social sharing is not uniform, but rather depends on the congruency with the emotion to which the response is given. Initial support for the idea that a particular response can produce multiple effects comes from a study on consolation (Horowitz et al., 2001). This study showed that people who shared for communal reasons (i.e., reasons associated with affect, such as being loved or understood) were more satisfied when they received communal reactions. In contrast, people who shared for agentic reasons (i.e., reasons associated with problem-solving, such as striving for power) were more satisfied after an agentic response.

We conduct three studies to test our emotion-congruency hypothesis. Study 4.1a tests whether the responses that sources *prefer* are emotion-specific, by examining for a range of possible responses which ones are congruent with which specific emotion. Study 4.1b tests whether the responses that are actually *provided* by the interaction partners are emotion-specific. Study 4.2 directly tests the emotion-response congruency hypothesis, and examines whether the positive effects of socially sharing one's emotions occur only when the obtained response is congruent with the emotion that is shared.

Anger and Regret

To test the emotion-response congruency hypothesis, we focus again on the emotions anger and regret. Anger is a frequently experienced emotion (Averill, 1982) with an experiential content involving, among other things, a feeling that you might explode, thoughts of violence towards others, the tendency to hit someone, to say something nasty, and to want to hurt and get back at

someone (Bougie et al., 2003; Shaver et al., 1987). The distinguishing action tendencies of anger are 'feel like hitting someone' and 'feel like yelling' (Roseman et al., 1994). In a study on the use of emotions in everyday language, regret was mentioned second most frequently (Shimanoff, 1984). Regret involves a feeling that you should have known better, thinking about what a mistake you made, and the goal of wanting to get a second chance. The distinguishing action tendencies are 'feel like kicking yourself' and 'feel like correcting your mistake' (Roseman et al., 1994; Zeelenberg et al., 1998b). Given the different modes of action readiness associated with these emotions, we expect that people prefer to obtain different responses when they share anger than when they share regret, and that the effect of a particular response is dependent on its congruency with the emotion that is shared.

The differences in modes of action readiness associated with anger and with regret lead us to expect that sharing anger experiences may affect different aspects of people's well-being than sharing experiences of regret. Anger results when people blame others for a negative situation (Bougie et al., 2003; Smith & Lazarus, 1993). When people experience anger, their evaluation of another person is at stake. Therefore, we expect that sharing anger may influence people's evaluations of others, but in line with the emotion-response congruency hypothesis, we expect that the evaluations of others only become more positive if the response is congruent with the anger experience. Regret is a self-conscious emotion. People experience regret when they feel that the outcome of a situation would have been better, had they acted differently (Zeelenberg, Van Dijk, Manstead, & Van der Pligt, 1998a). When people experience regret, their self-image is at stake. Thus, we expect that sharing regret has a positive effect on people's self-evaluation in the case of emotion-response congruency. We now turn to our first study, in which we test whether the response that people prefer is dependent on the specific emotion they share.

STUDY 4.1A

In the present study we examine the idea that people who experience anger would like to receive other responses than people who experience regret. There are numerous ways in which interaction partners can react when sources share their emotions. However, because the present research is a first attempt

to investigate the emotion-response congruency hypothesis, we focus on a limited set of responses which are clearly distinct from each other, derived from the literatures on social sharing (Christophe & Rimé, 1997; Luminet et al., 2000; Singh-Manoux & Finkenauer, 2001; Zech, Rimé, & Nils, 2004), on more general social interaction (Alicke et al., 1992; Bales, 1951), on social support (Goldsmith, McDermott, & Alexander, 2000), and word-of-mouth communication (Bougie et al., 2003). Three judges carefully read the articles derived from this literature search. Each judge derived a list of responses from the articles as well as items to measure these responses. By discussion, they derived the following eight responses that are included in the present research: (1) de-dramatizing, defined as putting the experience into perspective, (2) confirming, which is confirming the opinion or the emotion shared by the source, (3) hostility towards the perpetrator, defined as deflating the status of the perpetrator, (4) giving the source advice about how to handle the situation or to solve the problem, (5) bonding, which is stressing social bonds between the source and the interaction partner, (6) disagreeing, which is disagreeing with the opinion or the emotion shared by the source, (7) support, which are attempts at comforting, or expressing unconditional support towards the source, and (8) tell a similar experience.

It is important to realize that the responses in themselves do not express a particular univocal appraisal pattern of the situation. That is, a particular response may express different evaluations of the situation to the source, depending on the specific emotion shared. To illustrate, people who experience regret may express a feeling of self-blame when they share their emotion. Confirming these people may convey the meaning that they are indeed responsible for the negative situation. Giving the same response of confirmation to people who experience anger (and thus blame others) may communicate that someone else can be held responsible for the negative situation.

Predictions

Besides the general emotion-response congruency hypothesis, we have specific predictions about congruency between anger and regret and the responses. First, because anger is a result of other-blame (Smith & Lazarus, 1993), we expect that confirmation is congruent with anger, since it conveys verification

that the negative situation should be attributed to someone else. In addition, typical goals associated with anger are wanting to hurt someone and wanting to get back at someone (Bougie et al., 2003; Roseman et al., 1994). Hence, angry people may hope that their interaction partner responds by expressing hostility towards the source of the anger. Thus, we expect that hostility and confirmation are responses that are congruent with anger.

Regret arises when people hold themselves responsible for the negative experience (Zeelenberg et al., 1998a). People who share regret may hope that their interaction partner disagrees with this attribution. In addition, the self-blame element of regret may lower people's self-esteem. In these cases, people like to receive responses that enhance their self-esteem, such as de-dramatization and bonding (a feeling of being respected by others may enhance self-esteem). We thus expect that responses of disagreement, de-dramatization, and bonding are congruent with regret.

Method

Participants were 82 students from Tilburg University (33 men, 49 women, mean age 21 years). They were recruited by flyers and posters on campus and received seven euros for participation. Participants came to the laboratory and were seated in individual cubicles. The experiment was presented as part of a series of studies, and it was conducted via the computer. The instructions appeared on the computer screen. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions of the two-group design: anger versus regret.

Participants read that they were going to watch a short clip from a home video recently made by students. They were instructed to watch the video carefully and to imagine themselves in the situation of the main character, called Tina (who would be the person who was experiencing the emotion). The video in both conditions shows the same situation: a student was making a film about her house and her roommates. The student entered the room of one of her roommates, Tina, who was sitting behind her computer. While they were chatting, Tina discovered on the University web pages that she missed the admission deadline for her exams. According to the University rules, she now had to pay €23 administration costs (approximately $28). At this point, the video differed between conditions: participants in the regret condition saw Tina

blaming herself for being late, she expressed her regret nonverbally and by saying how stupid she had been, and she asked upset to turn off the camera. In the anger condition, participants saw Tina blaming the University for having stupid rules and deadlines. She expressed her anger nonverbally and by calling the University bad names, and she asked upset to turn off the camera.

After having watched the video, the participants were asked to answer several questions concerning what they would think and feel in Tina's situation. First, as a manipulation check, participants were asked to what extent they would feel angry at the University, and to what extent they would feel regret (1 = *not strong at all*, 7 = *very strong*). Next, the participants were asked about the response they would like to hear when they were in Tina's position (on scales from 1 = *not at all*, to 7 = *very much*). The following items were used: "What's done is done, so it's no use worrying about it" (de-dramatize), "That is very stupid indeed" (confirmation), "Damn, what a ridiculous University!" (hostility), "I would pay as soon as possible and just stop thinking about it" (advice), "But you are still my favourite roommate" (bonding), "I don't think it is stupid at all" (disagree), "Come sit down, let's have a drink" (support), and "Last semester, I was late too" (similar experience).

Results and Discussion

The manipulation check showed that, as expected, participants in the anger condition reported that they would experience more anger (M = 5.98, SD = 1.06) than regret (M = 4.49, SD = 2.01), $t(80) = 4.17$, $p < .001$. Participants in the regret condition reported that they would experience more regret (M = 5.54, SD = 1.21) than anger (M = 3.73, SD = 1.73), $t(80) = 5.48$, $p < .001$.

A MANOVA with condition (anger vs. regret) as the independent variable and the response items as dependent variables revealed a significant multivariate difference between the two conditions $F(8,73) = 5.09$, $p < .001$, providing support for the idea that specific responses are congruent with specific emotions. Univariate one-way ANOVAs showed a significant difference for five out of the eight responses (see Table 4.1). As expected, participants in the anger condition preferred responses of confirmation and hostility. Participants in the regret condition preferred their interaction partner to de-dramatize, give advice, or disagree with them. Note that these responses all involved some

kind of interpretation of the situation. People who experienced regret thus desired to receive the opinion of others when they shared their emotion. Probably this was related to the fact that regret involves a feeling of having made a bad decision. By asking for the opinions of others, people might hope to learn that they did not do anything wrong at all, or that the situation was not as bad as it seemed to be. The predicted congruency between regret and bonding also seemed to emerge from the data, but this result was not significant. Taken together, these data supported the idea that specific responses are congruent with specific emotions.

Table 4.1

Desired response after sharing a specific emotion: Study 4.1a

	Condition					
	Anger (N = 41)		Regret (N = 41)			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	$F(1,80)$	*p*
De-dramatize	3.12	1.74	4.27	1.92	8.03	.01
Confirmation	4.95	2.01	3.05	1.66	20.91	.00
Hostility	5.44	1.66	4.32	1.94	7.91	.01
Advice	3.34	1.67	4.76	1.48	16.51	.00
Bonding	3.90	2.00	4.76	2.14	3.48	.07
Disagree	2.10	1.67	3.07	1.82	6.39	.01
Support	4.56	1.47	4.39	1.64	.25	.62
Similar experience	4.98	1.51	5.07	1.56	.08	.77

Note. Responses were measured on scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).

STUDY 4.1B

People clearly desire specific responses, dependent on the emotion they share. However, are the responses they actually receive emotion-specific as well? This question is addressed in the present study. The method used was the same as in Study 4.1a, with the difference that in the present study, participants were asked to imagine themselves in the situation of the person making the video, and to report what they would say if they would respond to Tina. Responses were measured with the same items as used in Study 4.1a. For each item, participants indicated to what extent they would say this to Tina. Participants

were 81 students who had not participated in Study 4.1a (25 men, 56 women, mean age 22 years). They received seven euros for participation.

Results and Discussion

The manipulation check showed that, indeed, participants in the anger condition perceived Tina to experience more anger (M = 6.61, SD = .59) than regret (M = 5.05, SD = 1.89), $t(79) = 5.03$, $p < .001$. Participants in the regret condition perceived Tina to experience more regret (M = 5.90, SD = 1.34) than anger (M = 3.02, SD = 1.54), $t(79) = 8.97$, $p < .001$.

A MANOVA with condition (anger vs. regret) as the independent variable and the response items as dependent variables revealed a significant multivariate difference between the two conditions, $F(8,72) = 2.30$, $p = .003$. Univariate one-way ANOVAs showed that only two responses that interaction partners gave differ between the emotions (see Table 4.2). Compared to Study 4.1a, which focused on which responses are preferred by sources, the results of the present study showed a smaller number of responses that differ between anger and regret. Thus, although people have a preference for specific responses when they share a particular emotion, the present results show that most responses were equally likely to be provided to people who experienced anger and to people who experienced regret. The only exceptions to this finding were the responses confirmation and disagreement: interaction partners were more likely to confirm people who experience anger, whereas they were more likely to disagree with people who experience regret. But besides this, the main finding was that interaction partners gave the same responses to people who share regret and to people who share anger.

Table 4.2

Actual response given to people sharing a specific emotion: Study 4.1b

	Condition					
	Anger (N = 41)		Regret (N = 40)			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*F*(8,72)	*p*
De-dramatize	3.98	1.71	4.35	2.13	.76	.39
Confirmation	4.59	1.95	3.03	1.94	13.03	.00
Hostility	4.24	1.81	3.90	2.07	.63	.43
Advice	4.34	1.65	4.52	1.96	.21	.65
Bonding	2.98	1.80	3.78	2.04	3.50	.07
Disagree	1.90	1.26	2.70	1.99	4.67	.03
Support	4.46	1.85	4.72	1.75	.43	.52
Similar experience	4.83	1.95	5.58	1.82	3.16	.08

Note. Responses were measured on scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).

Of course we realize that there is a potential drawback of the methodology used in Studies 4.1a and 4.1b. There was no real emotion induction, but the participants were asked to empathize with someone else who experienced the negative emotions. As a consequence, the participants may not have felt real emotions. Although we think that the rather elaborate video procedure used in these experiments is more likely to induce emotions than the often-used written scenarios, we are aware of the limitations of the present method. Of course, inducing real emotions may be a more reliable way to investigate their effects, and this is what we did in the next study.

To summarize, we obtained support for the idea that there is such a thing as emotion-response congruency. In other words, particular responses are more associated with some emotions than with others. More specifically, regret is congruent with de-dramatizing, advice, and disagreement. Anger is congruent with responses of hostility or confirmation. This congruency is more prevalent for the responses that people prefer than for the responses that they state to provide (and thus are likely to obtain).

STUDY 4.2

In the present study, we more directly investigate the emotion-response congruency hypothesis. We test whether the consequences of social sharing

are affected by the congruency between the emotion that people share and the response they receive from their interaction partner. We focus again on anger and regret. We test the emotion-response congruency hypothesis by focusing on one response that is congruent with anger – confirmation, and one response that is congruent with regret – de-dramatization. We selected these responses because they discriminated best among anger and regret in Study 4.1a and could be operationalized in the lab. The consequences of sharing that we address in the present study are the evaluation of the self and the evaluation of the interaction partner. We selected these facets of well-being because they are threatened by the emotions under investigation. The action tendency of regret is feeling like kicking yourself. When people experience regret, their evaluation of the self is at stake. Sharing would be positive for these people if it yields a more positive evaluation of the self. When people experience anger, they feel the tendency to hurt someone. For angry people, the evaluation of someone else is at stake. A positive result of sharing for angry people would be a more positive evaluation of their interaction partner (after all, having good relationships with other people can be conceived of as an important influence on one's well-being).

We induce either anger or regret, and let participants share this with a confederate. The confederate either confirms how bad the situation is, or de-dramatizes the negative experience of the participant. According to the emotion-response congruency hypothesis, we expect that people's evaluations of their interaction partner and themselves are affected by the congruency between the specific emotion they experience and the response they receive. More specifically, since angry people are occupied with their evaluations of others, we expect that their evaluation of the interaction partner is affected by the response they receive. The response congruent with anger is confirmation. We thus expect that people sharing anger have a more positive evaluation of their interaction partner when they are confirmed compared to when the interaction partner de-dramatizes the situation. When people experience regret, their self-evaluation is at stake. For regret, emotion-response congruency exists when the interaction partner de-dramatizes the situation. We thus expect that people who experience regret have a more positive self-evaluation when their interaction partner de-dramatizes the situation compared to when their interaction partner confirms them.

Method

Participants and design

Participants were 66 female first-year psychology students from Tilburg University (mean age 20 years) who received course credit for participation. They were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions of the 2 (emotion: anger vs. regret) × 2 (response: confirm vs. de-dramatize) full factorial design.

Procedure

The study was presented as a study of team performance. Participants came to the laboratory individually. The experimenter introduced her (female) assistant to the participants (to decrease the status of the assistant, who would later become the sharing partner of the participants). The assistant placed the participants in individual cubicles. The instructions appeared on the computer screen.

Creating involvement. Participants were informed that they formed a team with one other participant and that interaction took place via the computer (in fact, there was no other person). They learned that they were both going to answer a sequence of four multiple choice questions (derived from the Times IQ-test, Russell & Carter, 2001) independently from each other. To motivate them, they read that teams that answered all four questions correctly would receive a bonus question with which they could win twenty-five euros. The computer was pre-programmed so that all 'teams' answered all four questions correctly. For the bonus question, only one of the players of the team would give the answer. If this answer was correct, both players would win 25 euros, if this answer was wrong, both players would lose. To induce regret or anger we first asked both participants to provide a preliminary answer. They then saw the answer of their team-mate, which was programmed to be different from their own answer. Next, the computer decided which team member was allowed to give the final answer, which determined whether both team members would win or not.

Emotion induction. In the anger condition, the final question was a fairly easy number cruncher ("Which number should logically follow this sequence: 4

6 9 6 14 6 ...?")[5]. The difficulty of this question was pre-tested, and in the present study, only 4 out of the 35 participants failed to answer this question correctly. Participants read that their team-mate was selected to give the final answer, but first the participants were allowed to send a text message to their team-mate via the computer[6]. After they sent the message, the team-mate gave the final answer, which was the same answer as she had given originally (thus, she did not act on the advice). Finally, the computer showed that the final answer was wrong, as a consequence of which they both earned nothing: the right answer was the one that the participant had given in the first place.

In the regret condition, the final question was a multiple choice question derived from a pre-test ("What is the capital of Canada: Vancouver, Toronto, or Ottawa?")[7]. The pre-test showed that students indicated that they should know this, but the majority of students actually did not or were at least not certain (in the present study, 10 participants originally answered Vancouver, 11 answered Toronto, and 10 answered Ottawa). This way, the answer of the team-mate would induce doubt in the participant and therefore make the choice more difficult. To induce regret, the computer selected the participant who would give the final answer. Before doing so, the participants received a message from their team-mate, stating: "I am not completely sure, but I still think the correct answer is [original answer of the team-mate]". Next, the participants gave the final answer. If they again gave their initial answer, they learned that the answer of their team-mate would have been correct. If they switched and gave the answer that their team-mate proposed, they learned that their original answer would have been correct. Thus, in both cases they had made the wrong decision.

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[5] The correct answer is 19. This is how you arrive at 19: Leave every 6 out, these are fillers. Start with 4 and add this number with 5: 4 – 9 – 14 – 19.

[6] As an extra check of the induction of anger, we analysed the messages that the participants in the anger condition wrote to their team-mate. Two independent judges coded whether the participants in their messages mainly tried to persuade their team-mate, whether they invited their team-mate to make her own decision, or whether they suggested an answer but in a non-persuasive or non-confident manner. The inter-rater reliability was .88 and disagreement was resolved by discussion. The data of this analysis show that of 68% of the participants tried to persuade their team-mate (17% made an uncertain suggestion, and 15% instructed the team-mate to make her own decision). The finding that the large majority of the participants tried to convince the team-mate provides additional support (besides the pilot study) for the effectiveness of the current procedure to induce anger.

[7] The correct answer is Ottawa.

To avoid focusing participants' attention on the emotions and thus on the purpose of the study, we did not include a question tapping the emotions, but we conducted a pilot study with similar participants to examine the success of the manipulation (N = 69). In the pilot study, we followed exactly the same procedure as in the present study. Immediately after learning that they did not win any money, participants were asked to indicate to what extent they felt regret and to what extent they felt anger at that moment on a visual analog scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 100 (*very much*). The results of the pilot study showed that this procedure is effective – participants in the anger condition experienced more anger (M = 31.31) than regret (M = 3.44), $t(33)$ = 5.47, $p < .001$. Participants in the regret condition reported higher levels of regret (M = 49.27) than of anger (M = 11.55), $t(34)$ = 7.06, $p < .001$.

Sharing episode. Participants were instructed to call the assistant to start the second part of the study. The assistant (blind to the experimental purpose and hypotheses of the study) entered the cubicle, 'restarted' the computer and talked to the participant during the 1.5 minute waiting period. In the confirming response condition, the assistant made standardized comments that confirmed the negative emotions the participants felt, such as "That is indeed really bad." In the de-dramatizing response condition, the assistant de-dramatized the situation by making standardized comments such as "This could happen to anyone." After 1.5 minute, the computer indicated the start of the next session and the assistant left the cubicle.

The remaining part of the study consisted of our dependent variables, interspersed by filler items. Self-evaluation was measured by 'how satisfied with yourself are you at this moment?' on a visual analog scale ranging from '*not at all*' to '*very much.*' The values of the slider were 1-100 (not visible for the participants). Next, the participants were asked to evaluate their experience in the laboratory. Besides some general questions about the lab, the questionnaire contained the evaluation of the interaction partner, measured by a three-item scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*): 'How sociable was the lab assistant?' 'Were you hosted friendly by the assistant?', and 'How involved was the lab assistant?' (α = .72). After finishing the study, participants were asked to report the (perceived) goal of the study, and they were carefully debriefed. None of them was suspicious of the goal of the study. For ethical reasons, 25 euros were raffled among all participants at the end of the study.

Results and Discussion

Evaluation of the self

The emotion-response congruency hypothesis predicts that the consequences of sharing depend on the congruency between the specific emotion that people share and the response they receive. We first tested whether people's self-evaluation was influenced by the response they received. A 2 (emotion: anger vs. regret) × 2 (response: confirm vs. de-dramatize) ANOVA with self-evaluation as dependent variable (see Figure 4.1) revealed a significant interaction effect, $F(1,62) = 4.06$, $p < .05$. Simple effect tests showed that the effect of response was significant in the regret condition, $F(1,62) = 5.77$, $p < .05$, but not in the anger condition, $F(1,62) = .15$, *ns*. Regretful people who were confirmed had a lower self-evaluation ($M = 43.93$, $SD = 16.20$) than regretful people who received a de-dramatizing response ($M = 59.38$, $SD = 20.93$). The self-evaluation of angry participants did not differ between people who received a confirming response ($M = 72.17$, $SD = 19.29$) and people who received a de-dramatizing response ($M = 69.82$, $SD = 14.28$). Additional support for the emotion-response congruency hypothesis stems from the finding that main effect of response was not significant $F(1,62) = 2.20$, ns. The main effect of emotion was significant however, $F(1,62) = 19.21$, $p < .01$.

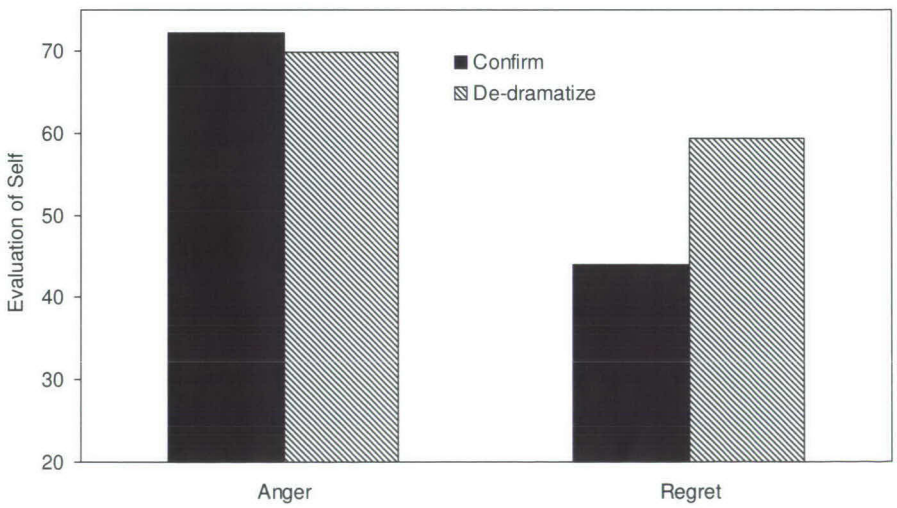

Figure 4.1

Mean evaluation of the self as a function of emotion and response: Study 4.2

It is important to realize that the regret in this study could result from two different processes – the participants in the regret condition could either have switched to the answer of their team-mate (i.e., followed up the advice), or they could stand by their own answer (i.e., not followed up the advice). In both cases, they learned that they made the wrong decision. To exclude the possibility that switching to the answer of the team-mate resulted in anger, we compared the regret of the people who switched (M = 45.67) with those who did not switch (M = 44.00) and found no differences between these groups, $t(29)$ = .14, p = .89. Additional independent samples t-tests on anger, evaluation of the self, and evaluation of the other consistently showed that the different processes to induce regret did not result in any differences.

These findings thus clearly support the emotion-response congruency hypothesis. When people experience regret, their self-evaluation is at stake. For these people, the response they receive is influential in how they evaluate themselves. When their interaction partner responded by de-dramatizing, they evaluated themselves more positively than when they obtained a confirming response. Angry people experienced no threat to their self-evaluation because they did not make any mistake, as a consequence of which their self-evaluation was not affected by the response they obtained.

Evaluation of the interaction partner

We predicted that the evaluation of the interaction partner is at stake when people are angry. A 2 (emotion: anger vs. regret) × 2 (response: confirm vs. de-dramatize) ANOVA with evaluation of the interaction partner as dependent variable (see Figure 4.2) revealed the hypothesized significant interaction effect, $F(1,62)$ = 4.51, p < .05. Simple effect tests showed that the effect of feedback was significant in the anger condition, $F(1,62)$ = 7.28, p < .01, but not in the regret condition, $F(1,62)$ = .14, *ns*. Participants in the anger condition indeed evaluated the interaction partner more positively after a confirming response (M = 6.35, SD = .54) than after a de-dramatizing response. The participants in the regret condition on the other hand did not evaluate the sharing partner differently when they were confirmed (M = 6.04, SD = .79) compared to when the interaction partner de-dramatized the situation (M = 6.15, SD = .42). This finding again supports the idea that the consequences of social sharing are a result of the match between the specific emotion that is shared and the response that is received. More specifically, when people share

anger, the evaluation of their interaction partner is at stake, and the response angry people receive influences how they evaluate their interaction partner. In further support of the emotion-response congruency hypothesis, both main effects for emotion and for response were not significant (respectively $F(1,62)$ = .22 and $F(1,62)$ = .12, ns).

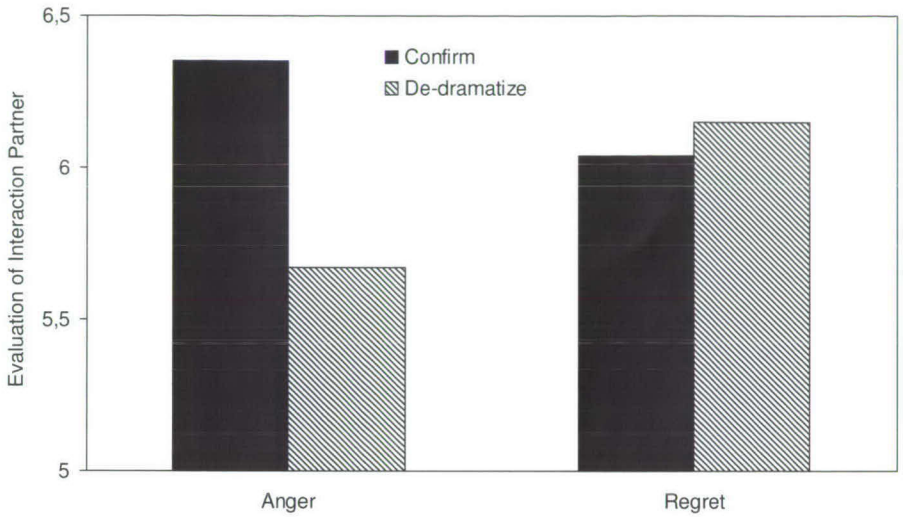

Figure 4.2

Mean evaluation of the interaction partner as a function of emotion and response: Study 4.2

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present research tested the emotion-response congruency hypothesis. Three studies showed that the response that sources *prefer* to receive from their interaction partner after socially sharing their negative emotions is emotion-specific. The response they actually *receive* is less emotion-specific. The outcomes of sharing, however, are dependent on the congruency between the response that people obtain, and the mode of action readiness associated with the emotion that they share. Thus, people desire emotion-congruent responses more than they receive them, whereas congruency would be optimal.

Regret constitutes a threat to the self. When people share their experiences of regret with others, they prefer responses from their interaction partner such as advice and de-dramatization. These responses convey that one needs not blame oneself for the negative situation. If these people receive the emotion-congruent response, they have a more positive self-evaluation than when they receive a different response, even if that response would be of positive valence. Angry people tend to blame others for their negative emotions, as a result of which their ongoing relations are at stake. When sharing their anger, people prefer to obtain responses that confirm them or that express hostility. Receiving the response that is congruent with the anger results in a more positive evaluation of their interaction partner than receiving a non-preferred response.

The present studies underline the importance of taking into account the response that people receive when investigating the consequences of social sharing. Study 4.1 showed that people who share their anger desire responses of confirmation and hostility. People who share regret desire that their interaction-partner de-dramatizes, gives advice, or disagrees with them. This is first evidence that different responses are desired when people share different emotions. Although we found preliminary evidence for our hypothesis, we should be cautious in generalizing this finding to other emotions. A next step for future research could be to elaborate these findings by investigating whether the emotion-response congruency hypothesis also holds for other specific emotions such as disappointment or sadness.

Emotion Specificity

Despite ample emotion research showing that specific emotions are different (Frijda et al., 1989; Roseman et al., 1994), and that different emotions are related to different behavior (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999), previous research on social sharing has hardly found emotion-specific effects of sharing. Extending the findings on emotion-specificity of social sharing in Chapters 2 and 3, the present data show that the responses that people desire as well as the consequences of sharing substantially differ between different emotions. This finding again supports the idea that social sharing should be conceived of as an emotion-specific phenomenon, advocating further research to differentiate among specific emotions when investigating social sharing.

Interestingly, although the interaction partner was not the source of the negative emotions, angry participant's evaluation of the interaction partner was dependent on the response that she provided. The evaluation of the interaction partner of people in the regret condition was not influenced by the response she had provided. This suggests that when angry, people's ongoing relationships with others might be at stake as well, and that even evaluations of people who are not involved in the negative situation can be influenced by the emotions of the angry person, which underlines the importance of emotion-congruency.

Limitations and Future Research

It is important to realize that the main character and the interaction partner in the video of Studies 4.1a and 4.1b were females. In addition, in Study 4.2, all participants, the experimenter and the assistant (who was the interaction partner) were female. We concentrated on females only to exclude possible intervening effects of gender. There are some differences, however, in the social sharing by males and females. For example, males tend to share with a more restricted range of people than females do (Rimé et al., 1998). The fact that there are gender differences in social sharing might imply that the effects of social sharing also differ between males and females. For example, a particular response such as de-dramatization could yield different effects when it is provided to a male (who may feel challenged in his view) than to a female (who may feel comforted). Therefore, it would be interesting to test the emotion-response congruency hypothesis using a sample consisting of males. In addition, the interaction partner in the present studies was always of the same sex as the person who shared her emotions. We speculate that receiving a comment from an opposite-sex interaction partner may have different effects than receiving the same comment from a same-sex interaction partner. For example, if a female interaction partner confirms the regret of a male, this might have more impact than when she confirms the regret of a female, since males may naturally have the tendency to present themselves in a positive manner to women. Future research could address these speculations.

The present research provides evidence for the idea that the outcomes of social sharing can be influenced by the response that sources receive from their

interaction partner. More specifically, the data show that sharing yields positive outcomes if responses are congruent with the mode of action readiness associated with the shared emotion. It is important to realize, however, that not only the congruency of the response with the emotion determines its outcomes. Other aspects of the response may also determine how people feel after sharing. At the core of these aspects is the capacity to be comforting. Different responses may differ in their comforting capacity. A comforting message can be defined as a message that has the capacity to alleviate or reduce the emotional distress that people experience when facing a difficult situation (Jones & Burleson, 2003). Thus, although people may sometimes prefer responses that confirm their negative emotions (e.g., hostility), such responses might not always help in comforting them. Other aspects of the response influence its effects as well. One of these aspects is the degree of appropriateness of the response. For example, if someone is drunk and wants to drive a car, this person may be satisfied when the interaction partner hands over the keys of the car. The next day, when sober again, this response may no longer be perceived as appropriate. In other words, it may not always be in the person's long-term interest to receive what he/she prefers in the short term. Thus, although the congruency of a response with an emotion is important, it is not the only factor that influences its effects.

The responses we investigated in the present research are not the only responses that may be relevant in social sharing. Despite our elaborate literature search, we stress that the eight responses we tested were only used to seek first evidence for our emotion-response congruency hypothesis. We do not claim that this list of responses is exhaustive. Besides the eight responses we tested, there may be different ways in which interaction partners can respond. Future research could address the desirableness and effects of a broader range of responses.

In addition, although we found effects of the emotion-response congruency on people's evaluation on themselves and their interaction partner, we should be careful in generalizing these findings to the broad range of possible beneficial effects of sharing. As pointed out in the introduction, there are various aspects related to well-being that can be affected by social sharing, and the evaluations of oneself and others are only two of these. The fact that we found emotion-response congruency to result in more positive evaluations of the self and

others does not necessarily imply that it also leads to emotional recovery. Thus, although we found first evidence for the idea that emotion-response congruency yields positive outcomes of social sharing, we should be cautious in generalizing this finding. Testing the emotion-response congruency hypothesis for other possible outcomes of social sharing is an interesting avenue for future research.

In conclusion, in the present chapter, we found support for the emotion-response congruency hypothesis, which states that in order to benefit from socially sharing one's negative emotions, it is important that the response obtained is congruent with the emotion shared. People can benefit from sharing, if they receive the response that is congruent with the emotion they share.

Chapter 5

"I Am So Angry at You" Versus "I Am So Angry at Him" Does it Matter With Whom We Share?[8]

In the present chapter we move a step beyond the studies presented so far. The previous studies concentrated on the motivations for socially sharing emotions and the responses thereto. In these studies, social sharing was implicitly conceived of as a behavior that occurs when people share their negative emotions with someone who is not involved in the negative situation. However, besides sharing with a person unrelated to the negative situation (third party), people can also share with the person they perceive to be responsible for the situation (the perpetrator). Whereas both of these behaviors are likely to occur when people experience negative emotions, previous social sharing research did not make this distinction and implicitly focused on the latter – talking to a third party (Harber, 2005; Luminet et al., 2000; Rimé et al., 1998; Rimé et al., 1991).

The main question addressed in the present chapter is whether the consequences of social sharing are dependent on the person with whom people share. There is reason to expect that sharing with the person who is seen as responsible for the negative situation may have different consequences from sharing with a non-involved person. Support for this idea comes from research in marketing and consumer psychology. One of the typical behaviors displayed by dissatisfied customers is expression of the dissatisfaction to (an employee of) the service provider or firm. This behavior is called 'complaining'. However, this stream of literature clearly discriminates between complaining and negative word-of-mouth communication, which occurs when people talk informally to others about their negative consumption experiences (Anderson, 1998). Complaining and word-of-mouth are both expressions of dissatisfaction, with the main difference that complaining is directed at the perpetrator of the negative situation, whereas word-of-mouth is directed at

[8] This chapter is based on Wetzer, Zeelenberg & Pieters (2006c)

someone who is not involved. These behaviors may look relatively similar, yet literature has shown that they are each other's supplement rather than each other's substitute. In other words, dissatisfied customers who have filed a complaint seem to be more likely to engage in word-of-mouth communication than dissatisfied customers who did not complain (Halstead, 2002). Other evidence for the idea that word-of-mouth and complaining are distinct behaviors comes from the finding that dissatisfied people who complained show larger increases in satisfaction than dissatisfied people who engaged in word-of-mouth communication (Nyer & Gopinath, 2005).

Even more compelling, in a study on behavioral responses to regret and disappointment (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004), engaging in negative word-of-mouth communication was associated with feelings of 'having done nothing', whereas complaining was associated with 'having done something'. In this study, participants recalled a negative experience with a service delivery. Next, they reported to what extent they had complained, engaged in negative word-of-mouth communication, and felt that they remained inert (measured by the items "I remained passive" and "I did not take action"). The results of this study showed that consumers felt less inert when they had complained more. Conversely, they felt more inert when they had engaged in more word-of-mouth communication. In other words, word-of-mouth communication is not considered as 'doing something' about the negative situation, whereas complaining is. Thus, both cases of sharing had opposite effects suggesting that they are considered to be two distinct behaviors.

The motivations for sharing identified in the previous chapters are based on the idea that people share with a third party. When sharing with the perpetrator, different motivations may play a role. In these cases, people may for example be motivated to stand up for themselves or to take revenge on the perpetrator. In a similar vein, the motivations put forward earlier in this dissertation, such as receiving advice and warning, may be less relevant when sharing with the perpetrator. If people have different reasons for sharing with the perpetrator, the outcomes of this behavior may yield different effects than sharing with a third party. This is examined in the present chapter.

When people share with the perpetrator, they may do so for reasons that are not relevant when sharing with a third party. First, if one directly addresses

the perpetrator, there is a chance to solve or restore the negative situation. For example, when you feel insulted and share this with the person who insulted you, he/she may solve the negative situation by explaining to you that you understood him/her completely wrong, or he/she may restore the situation by apologizing. Some situations can not be restored easily however. In such cases, people might still want to share with the perpetrator, but for other reasons than restoration.

Sharing with the perpetrator may be self-enhancing in the sense that one may feel good about having stood up for oneself. After a negative experience, people may have the feeling that they have let themselves be walked all over. Even if they cannot restore the negative situation anymore, they may try to subside this feeling by talking to the perpetrator. Merely expressing their dissatisfaction may already bring relief because people feel that they at least did something to stand up for themselves. When people express their views or opinions directly to the person who caused the negative emotion, they perceive the situation as more fair, irrespective of the instrumental outcome of the conversation (Lind, Kafner, & Earley, 1990). In addition, expressing feelings of discontent to the perpetrator may be a relatively difficult behavior that people do not look forward to. After performing this behavior, people may thus feel relief.

A third motivation for sharing with the perpetrator may be retribution. Previous research that investigated responses to negative consumption situations reported the existence of outraged and frustrated consumers who want to get back at firms (Bechwati & Morrin, 2003). When people share for retribution reasons, their intent is to induce negative emotions in the perpetrator, as a response to the negative emotions that the perpetrator evoked in themselves. Thus, the purpose of this behavior is to get even, to achieve a psychological equity. By expressing their negative feelings towards the perpetrator, people may have the feeling of having punished him/her. In these cases, sharing with the perpetrator may be conceived as a tit-for-tat strategy; people induce negative emotions in the person they perceive to be responsible for their own negative emotions.

As noted before, the present chapter examines the question whether social sharing yields different consequences when it is directed at the perpetrator

compared to when it is directed at a third party. There is reason to believe that sharing with the perpetrator will be related to more positive outcomes than sharing with a third party. This expectation is based on the hypothesized positive outcomes of sharing with the perpetrator (reparation, standing up for oneself, and retribution) and on the empirical finding that complainers felt less inert. Since social sharing is elicited by emotions, its effects on subsequent positive and negative emotions are addressed. Although it has been proven to be useful to distinguish among specific emotions, this research is a first exploration of this idea and therefore focuses on more general affective states. Moreover, the research presented in this chapter will address the possible explanations for the positive outcomes of sharing with the perpetrator (e.g., standing up for oneself and retribution). In sum, the expectations for the present chapter are that people who share with the perpetrator experience more positive affect than people who share with a third party, and that this result can be explained by the fact that these people stood up for themselves, and not by retribution.

In the present chapter, three studies are reported. Study 5.1 is a scenario study that shows that people who have shared with the perpetrator report higher positive affect than people who have shared with a third party. In addition, this study shows that sharing with the perpetrator is related to a stronger feeling of standing up for oneself and that it is perceived to be a more difficult behavior than sharing with a third party. Study 5.2 is another test of the main idea by means of a laboratory study in which emotions are induced. The findings replicate those of Study 5.1. Finally, in Study 5.3, two possible explanations for the findings of Studies 5.1 and 5.2 are addressed by means of a scenario study. The results of this study show that the positive outcomes of sharing with the perpetrator can not be attributed to feelings of retribution, but that standing up for oneself is more important in these situations.

STUDY 5.1

Besides testing the main question of the present chapter, this study also tests whether sharing with the perpetrator is indeed perceived as a more difficult behavior than sharing with a third party, and whether people who shared with the perpetrator felt more strongly that they stood up for themselves. As explained in the introduction, both difficulty and standing up for oneself are

expected to be higher for people who shared with the perpetrator. The scenario used in the present study has a non-reversible character to keep the two situations as constant as possible. After all, finding differences between perpetrator sharing and third party sharing would be obvious when the former has the additional benefit of undoing the harm. Therefore, the possibility to resolve or restore the situation was excluded from the present study.

Method

Participants and design

Participants were 56 students from Tilburg University (32 men, 24 women, mean age 22 years). They were approached at the campus and participated on a voluntary basis. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions: complain (sharing with the perpetrator) versus third party sharing.

Procedure

Participants completed the questionnaire individually. First the participants were instructed to imagine the following situation:

> You need a new television because yours is broken. At an electronics shop you see three televisions that you like. You go to the counter to ask for advice, but the shop assistants are drinking coffee at the back of the shop. They look at you, but they continue their conversation anyway. You decide to go to one of the shop assistants and you ask him whether he can provide information about the televisions. He tells you to look at the descriptions on the signs. You are angry at the shop assistants, but because you want a new television instantly, you decide to buy the one with the largest screen. The shop assistant does not look you in the eyes while settling your bill. When you leave the store nobody says goodbye to you. At home you think back about what happened and you are not comfortable with the situation.

From this point, the scenario differs per condition. Participants in the complain condition read:

> You decide to call the shop assistant to account. On your receipt you find the phone number of the shop and the name of the shop assistant. You phone the shop assistant and tell him that you think he treats customers very rudely,

> that you are dissatisfied, and that you can not imagine that it is pleasant for him to treat people this way.

Participants in the third party condition read:

> You call a friend and tell him about the annoying shop assistant. You tell your friend that you think the shop assistant treats customers very rudely, that you are dissatisfied, and that you can not imagine that it is pleasant for him to treat people this way.

After reading the scenario, participants answered the following questions on scales ranging from *not at all* (1) to *very much* (7). Positive affect was measured by the items "To what extent would you experience relief/satisfaction" (α = .70). Standing up for oneself was measured by the item "Do you think you stood up for yourself?". Difficulty of the behavior was measured by "Was it difficult to have the phone call?".

Results and Discussion

A MANOVA with condition as the independent variable and positive affect, standing up for oneself, and difficulty of the behavior as the dependent variables showed a significant difference between the conditions, $F(3,52)$ = 18.83, $p < .001$. This indicates that sharing with the perpetrator is different from sharing with a third party. A univariate ANOVA showed that participants in the complain condition reported a higher level of positive affect (M = 3.55, SD = 1.36) than participants in the third party condition (M = 2.25, SD = .83), $F(1,54)$ = 18.64, $p < .001$.

Univariate ANOVAs showed that participants in the complain condition rated their behavior as more difficult (M = 4.18, SD = 1.57) than participants in the third party condition (M = 2.36, SD = 1.39), $F(1,54)$ = 21.16, $p < .001$. In addition, participants in the complain condition had a stronger feeling that they stood up for themselves (M = 4.89, SD = 1.69) than participants in the third party condition (M = 2.25, SD = 1.23), $F(1,54)$ = 42.61, $p < .001$. There were no gender differences on the dependent variables.

These results provide preliminary support for the idea that sharing negative emotions with the perpetrator of the emotions produces more positive affect than sharing them with a non-involved person. A first exploration of possible explanations for this effect revealed that sharing with the perpetrator is perceived as more difficult than sharing with a third party. In addition, people who shared with the perpetrator had a stronger feeling that they stood up for themselves. These explanations will be further investigated in Study 5.3. However, to found the findings of Study 5.1 more firmly, we first conduct a lab study in which the general idea is tested by means of real emotion induction. Thus, Study 5.2 is a lab study in which we test again whether sharing with the perpetrator leads more to positive consequences than sharing with a third party. In this study, real emotions are induced, and the effects of sharing these with the third party are compared with the effects of sharing them with the perpetrator.

STUDY 5.2

Method

Participants and design

Participants were 53 students from Tilburg University (28 male and 25 female, mean age 21 years). They were recruited at the campus and received 7 euros for participation. They were randomly assigned to one of the conditions of the two-group design (complain versus third party).

Procedure

Participants arrived in the laboratory in groups of four to twelve people where they were placed in individual cubicles. The procedure used was inspired by a study by Bushman (2002) on venting anger. First, participants received instructions to write an essay on the consumption of alcohol, either pro or contra, dependent on their position. Second, their essays were collected to be randomly distributed among fellow participants for evaluation. In fact, all participants received a standardized handwritten essay produced by the experimenters. The participants evaluated this essay and thought that at the same time, their essay was evaluated by a fellow participant. In fact, their essay was provided with negative comments written by the experimenters.

Each essay received a low grade (5.5 on a scale from 1-10) and the title was judged as 'bad title'. In addition, on top of the essay was a handwritten comment stating 'Bad essay, even worse arguments, one randomly chosen paragraph was crossed off, a comment stated 'I think we could expect more from University students', and one randomly chosen paragraph was commented on in the margin as 'nonsense!' This procedure has proven to induce anger in people (Bushman, Baumeister, & Stack, 1999). This was checked for by means of an emotion measure.

Third, the manipulation of sharing with the perpetrator versus with a third party came in. Participants in the third party condition were instructed to write about the evaluation of their essay and that this message would be delivered to a fellow participant who had not evaluated it. Participants in the complaining condition received the instruction to write about the evaluation of their essay to the fellow participant who had evaluated it. Fourth, after this writing task, all participants again rated their current emotions. As an additional test for the idea that it matters to whom people share, they also rated their perception of the situation in hindsight. If sharing with the perpetrator leads to more positive affect, they might also become milder in their perception of the situation. In other words, when people feel more positive, they may put the situation more into perspective as a result of which they care less about their negative evaluation. To measure suspicion, participants were asked to write down what they thought the purpose of the study was. To conclude, participants received a written debriefing in which the purpose of the study was carefully explained. In addition, in the debriefing it was stressed that everybody had received the same negative evaluation, regardless of what they had written.

Measures

After the participants received their essay with the negative evaluation, they were asked to rate their anger. All measures in this study consisted of 7-point scales ranging from *not at all* (1) to *very much* (7). As in Chapter 2, anger was measured by the three items anger, irritation, and frustration (α = .84). Positive affect was measured by asking participants to indicate to what extent they experienced relief and satisfaction at that moment (α = .66). Perception of the situation was measured by the item "To what extent do you agree with the evaluation of your essay?"

Results and Discussion

The procedure used was effective in inducing anger (M = 4.18, SD = 1.45), on a 7-point scale, with no differences between the conditions, $F(2,76) = 2.15$, ns. A MANOVA with condition as independent variable and positive affect and perception of the situation as dependent variables showed again significant differences between sharing with the perpetrator and with a third party, $F(2,50) = 5.62$, $p < .01$. Univariate ANOVAs showed, as expected and in line with the results of Study 5.1, that participants who shared with the perpetrator of the negative emotions experienced more positive affect (M = 4.77, SD = 1.14) than participants who shared with a third party (M = 4.19, SD = 1.40), $F(1,51) = 4.64$, $p < .05$. In addition, in hindsight, participants who had shared with the perpetrator agreed more with their negative evaluation (M = 3.19, SD = 1.70) than participants who had shared with a third party (M = 2.37, SD = 1.52), but this difference only approached significance, $F(1,51)$ = 3.45, p = .07. This finding suggests that it does matter with whom people share. Remember that the participants in the present study did not receive a response after they shared their emotions. The changed opinion is thus not a result of a conversation in which clarity was derived. Rather, merely sharing with the perpetrator resulted in another opinion than sharing with a third party. Again, there were no gender differences.

Why do people experience more positive affect after venting to the perpetrator than after venting to a non-involved person? Apparently, it is not merely utterance of the negative emotions, rather, the sharing should be done with the perpetrator of the negative emotions. What specific aspect of sharing towards the perpetrator may account for the higher level of positive affect? One explanation for these findings might be that sharing directly with the perpetrator may give people the feeling that they stood up for themselves, as a result of which they experience more positive affect, "I did what needed to be done, I was not a coward". The positive effects of venting in this case thus do not result from merely expressing the negative feelings, but rather from a positive feeling that people stood up for themselves. When sharing with a third party, standing up for oneself does not play a role, which might explain the different results for sharing with the perpetrator and to a third party.

Another possible explanation is retribution: by expressing their negative feelings towards the perpetrator, people may have the feeling of having punished the source. Venting negative emotions to someone might induce negative feelings (e.g., guilt, frustration, or shame) in this person. Sharing with the perpetrator may be conceived of as a tit-for-tat strategy; people induce negative emotions in the person they perceive to be responsible for their own negative emotions. The next study explores whether the results of the previous studies are the consequence of the feeling that people stood up for themselves or of retribution.

STUDY 5.3

Three conditions are included in the present study: retribution, standing up for oneself, and sharing with a third party (to compare the results of this study with the previous studies). Besides exploring which aspect of sharing is associated to the increase of positive affect, there are more outcomes we focus upon in the present study, since sharing can have multiple beneficial effects. First, when sharing is beneficial it may lead to an increase of positive affect, but also in a decrease of anger (Rimé et al., 1991). Therefore, anger is assessed as well. Second, self-esteem is measured. Participants in Study 5.1 reported that sharing with the perpetrator was a more difficult behavior to perform than sharing with a third party. When people perform a behavior they experience to be difficult, they may perceive themselves more positively. This information may enhance their self-esteem (Stevens & Fiske, 1995). Third, feelings of justice may play a role. When people have the feeling that they have been hurt by someone, they may perceive the situation as unjust and they may try to restore justice (Blodgett et al., 1993). Finally, we assess closure, that is whether people have the feeling that they can close the situation and leave it behind. We speculate that when social sharing enhances positive affect and other positive outcomes, it may affect people's ability to reconcile to the situation.

Method

Participants and material

The study was conducted among 75 students of Tilburg University (41 males, 34 females, mean age 22). They all volunteered for this study and individually

completed the questionnaire at the University campus. They were randomly assigned to one of the conditions of a three groups design: Retribution vs. standing up vs. third party.

Procedure

Again, a situation with an irreversible character was chosen. Participants were asked to read the following scenario:

> Imagine that you went to the hairdresser. Before the hairdresser started to cut your hair you talked about the desired hairdo. When the hairdresser is done, you are shocked by the result. Despite your accurate explanation she cut off too much of your hair! You really look like a fool with this hairstyle. Nonetheless you do not say anything to the hairdresser about the result.

For participants in the retribution condition the story proceeded as follows:

> The next day, your hairdresser is waiting to enter the trendy club where you work. Your job is to decide who is allowed to enter the club and who is not. You deny her access to the club. The only option that remains for the hairdresser is to leave and return home.

For participants in the standing up condition the story proceeded as follows:

> The next day you decide to go back to the hairdresser. Although nothing can be done about the situation, you express your displeasure to her.

For participants in the third party condition the scenario continued as follows:

> When you meet a friend the next day you express your displeasure about what happened at the hairdresser.

Measures

The manipulation checks consisted of the items "To what extent did you stand up for yourself?" and "To what extent did you take revenge?" Positive affect was measured by the items "To what extent do you experience relief at this moment?" and "How satisfied are you about how you responded to this situation?" (α = .65). Anger was measured by the items "To what extent do you

experience anger/frustration/irritation at this moment?" (α = .85). Self-esteem was assessed by the items "Is your feeling of self-worth enhanced?", and "Do you feel good about yourself?" (α = .71). Perceived justice was measured by the two items "Do you feel that justice is done now?" and "To what extent do you think that you did accomplish justice?" (α = .89). Feeling of closure was measured by two items "Do you feel the situation is solved now?" and "Are you now more able to reconcile yourself to the situation?" (α = .52).

Results and Discussion

First, two one-way ANOVAs were conducted on the manipulation checks. The results showed that the manipulation was effective (see Table 5.1). Participants in the retribution condition reported a stronger feeling of having taken revenge than participants in the other two conditions. In a similar vein, participants in the stand up condition reported a stronger feeling of having stood up for themselves than participants in the other two conditions.

Table 5.1

Manipulation checks and means on dependent variables: Study 5.3

	Condition				
Measure	Retribution	Stand up	Third party	$F(2,72)$	p
Standing up	2.64_a (1.47)	5.04_b (1.21)	1.52_c (.59)	34.34	< .001
Revenge	5.00_a (1.98)	2.96_b (1.43)	2.04_c (1.21)	23.22	< .001
Self-esteem	2.46_a (.89)	4.34_b (.79)	2.68_a (1.01)	32.64	< .001
Residual anger	3.51_a (1.39)	4.35_b (1.43)	5.23_c (1.25)	9.90	< .001
Positive affect	2.18_a (.93)	4.44_b (1.24)	2.46_a (.96)	34.34	< .001
Closure	2.66_a (1.15)	3.62_b (.94)	2.60_a (1.27)	6.45	.003
Justice	2.32_a (1.35)	3.60_b (1.50)	2.06_a (1.03)	9.90	< .001

Note. Standard deviations enclosed in parentheses. Means with a different subscript differ significantly at $p < .05$.

A MANOVA on the dependent measures was significant, $F(10,136) = 10.24$, $p < .001$, and there were no gender differences. The results of the univariate ANOVAs on the dependent variables show that overall, standing up for oneself yields more positive consequences than taking revenge or venting to a third party. More specifically, participants in the stand up condition reported that they would experience a higher level of positive affect than participants in the

revenge condition and the third party condition (who did not differ significantly from each other). In addition, people who stood up for themselves reported higher scores on closure and on feelings of justice than participants who avenged or who vented to a third party. These results suggest that standing up for oneself leads to enhanced feelings of justice. When people judge a situation as more just, they may better be able to achieve closure. Another positive consequence of standing up for oneself is that this leads to a higher self-esteem than taking revenge or venting to a third party.

Interestingly, anger is lower after people took revenge than after they stood up for themselves. This finding suggests that although revenge is less associated with positive consequences than standing up for oneself, it is nevertheless effective in reducing anger. People who share their feelings with the person who caused the negative event experience more positive affect, higher feelings of closure and justice, and have a higher self-esteem than people who took revenge, irrespective of the absence of a response of the source. These results suggest that venting to the perpetrator has more beneficial effects than taking revenge on the perpetrator.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present chapter investigated whether the consequences of socially sharing emotions are dependent on who the receiver of the message is. We compared the effects of sharing with the perpetrator of the negative emotions with the effects of sharing with a non-involved person, in a scenario study and in a lab study with real emotion induction. The results of both studies showed that people who expressed their displeasure to the person who is responsible for the negative situation experienced more positive affect than people who shared their emotions with someone who is not involved in the negative situation. In the final study of this chapter we explored possible explanations for these findings. We found that people who stood up for themselves experience more positive outcomes than people who took revenge on the perpetrator. This study thus excluded the explanation of revenge; the increase in positive affect after complaining to the perpetrator can not be attributed to feelings of retribution, rather, the feeling of standing up for oneself is relevant in producing positive outcomes of sharing with the perpetrator.

The present research provides some insights in the explanations for more positive outcomes of sharing with the perpetrator. However, there may be additional aspects of sharing with the perpetrator that may account for these results. The findings of the present research show that standing up for oneself is one of the relevant aspects, and that retribution is not, but there may be more reasons why sharing with the perpetrator is beneficial. For example, it may be more difficult to express discontent to the perpetrator than expressing it to a third party, who is a close intimate in the majority of the cases (Rimé et al., 1998). After having performed a behavior that people perceive to be difficult, they may experience more positive emotions such as relief and satisfaction. Further research is needed to explore the aspects of sharing with the perpetrator that yield the positive outcomes.

The findings of the present chapter are in line with the stream of literature on consumer psychology that distinguishes complaining from word-of-mouth communication, based on the person the sharing is directed at (the perpetrator and a third party, respectively). Literature on this topic suggested that complaining and word-of-mouth communication are two distinct behaviors (Nyer & Gopinath, 2005; Singh, 1988). Moreover, research on dissatisfied customers showed that people who complained to the marketer experienced a reduction in their dissatisfaction, whereas people who engaged in word-of-mouth communication did not (Nyer & Gopinath, 2005). This finding corresponds to the findings of the present chapter. The authors attribute these results to the public commitment that is inherent to word-of-mouth communication: When engaging in word-of-mouth communication, people express their dissatisfaction publicly and hence become committed to it, whereas this is not the case when they complain. Although public commitment might play a role, it was less relevant in the studies reported in the present chapter, since in Study 5.2, in which real emotions were induced and shared, the sharing was not public. Instead, participants wrote their message to another person, and this was all anonymous. In this situation, the public commitment could thus not account for the fact that sharing with a third party was associated with less intense positive affect than sharing with the perpetrator. Thus, in both cases (public or anonymous), people experience less positive outcomes when they share with a third party. This implies that different processes may be at work when people share with a third party. When publicly sharing with a third party, they may have the feeling that they

should stick to their opinion. When privately sharing with a third party, they may become angry again as a result of the re-evocation of the negative emotions (Bushman, 2002), or they may have the feeling that they complain without really standing up for themselves.

All in all, the present chapter again shows that socially sharing emotions can yield positive outcomes. It suggests however, that instead of investigating the general question whether it is beneficial to share one's emotions, research should be more specific and take into account with whom people share.

Chapter 6

Summary and Discussion

Social sharing is ever-present in daily life. It is one of the most frequently used ways to respond to situations that evoke emotions. Interestingly, findings on the beneficial effects of social sharing are inconclusive. In the present dissertation, various aspects were investigated that could play a role in determining the outcomes of sharing. The studies presented focus on the motivations for social sharing (i.e., why do people share their emotions?), the responses that people prefer (i.e., which response do people prefer to obtain when they share?), and the responses they actually receive (i.e., how do responders react to sources?). In addition, it was tested whether the received response should be congruent with the shared emotion in order to yield positive outcomes of sharing, and whether sharing to the perpetrator of the emotions leads to more positive consequences of sharing than sharing to a third party, and why. Another goal of this dissertation was to investigate whether social sharing is an emotion-specific behavior, and to map conditions under which social sharing yields positive outcomes. Below the research conducted to achieve these goals will be summarized. In the remainder of this chapter, the implications of the findings of the present dissertation will be discussed, and the chapter concludes by describing the contributions of this research to existing literature. Let us, however, start with a summary of the studies of this dissertation.

Research in Chapter 2 tested whether adopting the emotion-specific approach in investigating social sharing would contribute to a better understanding of this phenomenon. Another goal of this chapter was to investigate whether different motivations could be driving social sharing, and to map which motivations drive this behavior. In Study 2.1, participants recalled a negative experience and indicated which emotions they felt and why they shared their experience. Study 2.2 asked participants to complete a diary every night, and in case they experienced anger or regret, to complete a questionnaire on why they shared their experience. A structural equation model on the data of Study 2.1 and analyses of variance on the data of Study 2.2 showed that people can

indeed be driven by various motivations to share their emotions. Moreover, the motivations for social sharing are dependent on the specific emotion that people share. More specifically, people who share anger are more likely to be driven by motivations of venting, support search, and revenge than people who share regret. These people are more likely to be driven by motivations of advice search, bonding, warning, and entertaining. Social sharing thus turns out to be an emotion-specific behavior, which can be driven by different motivations.

Chapter 3 built on Chapter 2 by investigating for a broader range of emotions to which motivations they are connected. In this chapter, the focus was on a specific type of situations – negative consumption situations, to investigate a homogeneous set of situations. Study 3.1 asked participants to recall a negative consumption experience and to report which emotions they experienced in that situation. The data revealed that anger, regret, frustration, irritation, disappointment and uncertainty are relevant emotions in these situations. In Study 3.2, participants retrieved an experience involving one of these emotions from memory and reported why they had shared it. A multiple discriminant analysis (MDA) on the data of Study 3.2 revealed that sharing experiences of anger, frustration, and irritation is driven by the motivations of venting and taking revenge. Sharing regret is related to motivations of bonding, entertaining and warning. Experiences of disappointment are shared in order to search for support, search for advice, or warning, and experiences of uncertainty are shared to search for support and advice. Moreover, the MDA revealed that the motivations for socially sharing negative consumption experiences can be classified along two dimensions, namely destructive versus constructive, and self-focused versus other-focused. This chapter thus provided additional evidence for the idea that social sharing is emotion-specific.

In Chapter 4, the role of the response that people receive and its effects on the outcomes of sharing were tested. The idea behind the studies in this chapter was that social sharing is an interaction, instead of mere expression of emotions. Consequently, the response that people obtain may influence its outcomes. The goals of Chapter 4 were to test this idea, and to test the emotion-response congruency hypothesis, which states that the outcomes of social sharing are dependent on the congruency between the emotion that people share and the response they receive. In Studies 4.1 and 4.2,

participants watched a video in which the main character experienced either anger or regret. Next, they were asked to report which response they would prefer if they were in the main character's position (Study 4.1), or how they would respond if they would listen to the main character (Study 4.2). Analyses showed that the response that people prefer to obtain depends on which specific emotion they share. Angry people prefer responses that confirm their negative emotions, or that express hostility towards the perpetrator. People who share their regret desire responses that express advice, disagreement, or de-dramatization. Study 4.2 showed that the responses that people actually obtain are less emotion-specific. In Study 4.3, the emotion-response congruency hypothesis was tested and confirmed. People who share regret benefit from sharing when they receive a de-dramatizing response, but not when they receive a confirming response. In contrast, sharing anger yields positive consequences when people receive a confirming response, but not when they receive a de-dramatizing response. This chapter showed the importance of the role of the response that people receive (and its congruency with the shared emotion) in determining the outcomes of sharing.

Finally, research in Chapter 5 went beyond existing social sharing literature by examining whether it matters with whom people share their negative emotions. Previous research always assumed that people shared with a non-involved, third party. In daily life, people often share with the person whom they perceive to be responsible for the negative situation, which might be related to different outcomes. The goal of Chapter 5 was to investigate whether sharing with the perpetrator leads to more positive affect than sharing with a third party. This question was tested in Study 5.1 by means of a scenario, and in Study 5.2 by means of an experimental lab study in which real emotions were induced and in which participants were asked to express these to the perpetrator or to a third party. The results of these studies showed that sharing with the perpetrator leads to a higher intensity of positive affect. In Study 5.3, possible explanations for this finding were tested by means of a scenario. The results revealed that the positive outcomes of social sharing with the perpetrator can be explained by the fact that people in these cases stood up for themselves. This study also showed that feelings of retribution do not explain these results.

In sum, the findings reported in this dissertation provide various contributions to existing social sharing literature. First, they demonstrate that social sharing can be conceived of as an emotion-specific behavior, thus that various of its aspects differ per emotion. These findings imply that future research should distinguish among specific emotions when investigating social sharing, rather than investigating it as a unitary concept. Second, the present research shows that motivations for sharing play an important role, and that different motivations may instigate sharing, dependent on the emotion that people share (see also Wetzer, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2005). The third contribution of the present dissertation is that it shows that the response that sources receive plays an important role in determining the outcomes of sharing (see also Wetzer, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2006b). More specifically, the outcomes of sharing depend on the congruency between the shared emotion and the received response. Fourth, the findings show that it is useful to make a distinction with who people share: sharing with the perpetrator is related to more positive outcomes than sharing with a third party. Finally, the present findings reveal that it is valuable to investigate outcomes of sharing besides emotional recovery, which has been the main focus of previous social sharing research. The data presented in this dissertation show that different aspects of well-being can be affected by sharing, dependent on the emotion that people share. I will elaborate on this next.

STRUCTURING THE CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIAL SHARING

Previous social sharing research that investigated the outcomes of sharing only concentrated on the consequences for the sources themselves. For example, it investigated whether talking about a stressful video affects the level of intrusive thoughts (Lepore et al., 2000), blood pressure, and pulse rate (Lepore, Fernandez-Berrocal, Ragan, & Ramos, 2004), or it investigated whether the amount of social sharing was related to more emotional recovery (Rimé et al., 1991). Clearly, these outcomes are all focused on the sources themselves, and not on their relationships with other people. However, besides these effects, social sharing can have more consequences, which are focused on interactive aspects in the situation.

In the present dissertation, the outcomes of social sharing that were assessed went beyond outcomes for the source. In Chapter 4, the effects of sharing on

people's self-evaluation and their evaluation of the responder were assessed. Chapter 5 investigated the consequences of social sharing for the emotions that people experience and for several attributions of the situation (perceived justice, closure, and evaluation of the situation). These data suggest that social sharing can have various consequences besides outcomes for the source. It may be useful to structure these potential outcomes of sharing in order to gain a better understanding of its effects. Figure 6.1 represents the consequences that sharing can have. The straight arrows in this figure represent consequences of sharing for the relationship between different parties. For example, the arrow from source to responder represents how the source evaluates the responder after sharing. The bended arrows that point to the same party they started from represent the consequences that relate to this party only. For example, the arrow starting from and pointing to the source represents the outcomes of sharing for the source such as subsequent emotions and self-esteem. I will elaborate on the different consequences of sharing below.

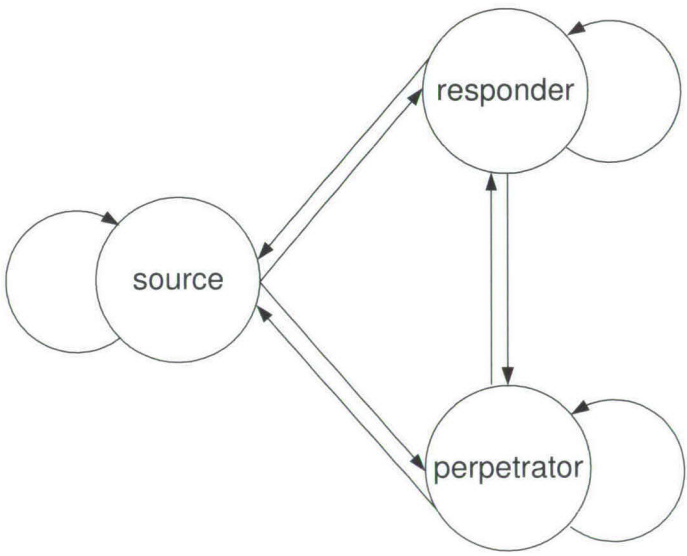

Figure 6.1

Overview of consequences of social sharing

Consequences for the relationship between source and responder

Social sharing of emotions can influence the relationship between the source and the responder. Support for this consequence of sharing comes from Chapter 4 in which it was shown that angry people evaluate responders more positively when they confirmed the source compared to when they put the situation into perspective. In addition, in a study on social challenges to emotional disclosure (Lepore et al., 2004), participants watched a gang rape movie and were instructed to talk about it to a fellow participant. In fact, this fellow participant was a confederate who was instructed to provide validating responses (e.g., nodding and expressing agreement) or challenging responses. The data showed that the confederate was evaluated as more similar, friendly, and empathic when she validated the participant compared to when she challenged the participant. Thus, social sharing may affect people's relationships with others, or more specifically, their evaluations of the responder.

The responder's evaluation of the source may also be affected by social sharing. Responders have an implicit tendency to classify complaints on various dimensions, such as whether they are verifiable versus non-verifiable, and whether they are instrumental versus expressive (Kowalski, 1996). How a particular complaint is perceived by the responder may also influence his/her opinion about the source. There are many opinions that responders can have about people who complain. Sources can for example be seen as exaggerating, as nagging, or as victims of a bad situation. Other support for the effects of sharing on the responder's evaluation of the source comes from a study on depression and the responses of others (Coyne, 1976). In this study, participants had a 70-minutes phone conversation with either depressed or non-depressed individuals. Afterwards, they filled out questionnaires in which they reported their evaluation of the other. The results showed that the evaluations of the other person were related to the depression of this other person. For example, how happy or sad, or how active or passive people were evaluated by their interaction partner correlated significantly with their depression.

Consequences for the responder

Social sharing can also have consequences for the responder that go beyond his or her personal relationships. In the study by Coyne (1976), participants

who had a phone conversation with a depressed other were significantly more depressed, anxious, and hostile compared to participants who had a phone conversation with a non-depressed other. Other evidence for consequences for the responder comes from a study on secondary social sharing (Christophe & Rimé, 1997). Participants were asked to retrieve an episode from their memories in which someone shared a low, moderate, or high intense emotion with them. Next, they were asked to rate the intensity of the emotion they experienced when listening to the social sharing episode. On a 10-point scale, participants in the low intensity conditions reported a mean emotional intensity of 6.29, participants in the moderate intensity condition reported a mean of 7.83, and participants in the high intensity condition reported a mean emotional intensity of 8.08. Listening to others who express their emotions may thus affect one's mood and/or emotions.

Consequences for the relationship between source and perpetrator

Sharing may also affect the relationship between the source and the perpetrator. When people share a negative experience that is evoked by someone else, they are likely to think negatively about this person. Expressing these feelings and receiving a response may influence their evaluation of the perpetrator. The idea that sharing influences people's opinion about the perpetrator has not been tested directly. However, research on venting negative emotions provides some evidence that supports this idea. When angry people were allowed to ventilate their anger by hitting a punching bag while thinking of the person who angered them, they behaved more aggressively towards this person (Bushman, 2002). The increase in aggressive behavior may reflect a more negative attitude towards this person. Thus, expressing negative emotions may affect the relationship between the source and the perpetrator.

Sometimes, perpetrators discover that sources have been talking negatively about them. This may also influence their evaluation of the source. Of course, perpetrators will not always find out that sources shared the negative experience, but when they do, this may influence how they think of the sources. Perpetrators may for example think that the source has been blackening them, which influences their evaluation of the source.

Consequences for the relationship between responder and perpetrator

There is a relationship that can be affected by social sharing in which the source is not involved: between the responder and the perpetrator. Listening to someone who expresses negative emotions and talks negatively about someone else may influence people's opinion about this other person. In other words, social sharing may also affect how the responder evaluates the perpetrator. To my best knowledge, this has never been addressed in social sharing research. However, in research on word-of-mouth communication this consequence received substantive attention. After all, it is important for firms to understand the effects of listening to negative stories about the firm for other (potential) customers. Ample research has shown that word-of-mouth communication can influence the responder seriously. Listening to someone who talks negatively about a product or brand for example influences people's acceptance of a new product (Arndt, 1967), their attitude about the brand (Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991), and their evaluation of the brand (Laczniak, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001). For socially sharing negative emotions that are evoked by someone else, these findings imply that the responder's attitude and evaluation of the perpetrator may be influenced by listening to the sharing of the source.

Although not a very common consequence, sharing may also influence how the perpetrator thinks of the responder. In case the perpetrator finds out that the source shared the negative experience with the responder, this may for example be experienced as gossiping, as a result of which the perpetrator may think negatively about the responder.

Consequences for the perpetrator

Finding out that the source shared the negative experience with someone else may also affect the perpetrator. Knowing that other talked negatively about them may for example reduce their self-esteem, induce anger or frustration, or let them re-evaluate their behavior.

Recognizing that social sharing can have multiple effects suggests that future research on the effects of social sharing should go beyond the effects it has for the sources themselves only. It would be interesting to induce sharing and measure the motivations and the wide range of different consequences that arose from the present research and previous literature. This research could

elaborate on the idea that the kind of outcomes that result from sharing depend on the emotions, the motivations, and the responses that people receive. For example, on the basis of the present data, I would expect that sharing for the motivation of warning has influence on the responder, sharing driven by bonding may influence the relationship between the source and the responder, and sharing for the motivation of revenge may affect the relationship between the responder and the perpetrator (as a result of listening to the negative and probably hostile message), and between the source and the perpetrator.

THE SOCIAL SHARING PROCESS

Acknowledging the role of motivations and responses elaborates the social sharing process as it has been conceptualized previously. The results of the present dissertation show that previous research passed over various important aspects, and that the motivations and responses should be taken into account in further research. In order to structure the social sharing process, I propose a model that describes the complete social sharing process (see Figure 6.2).

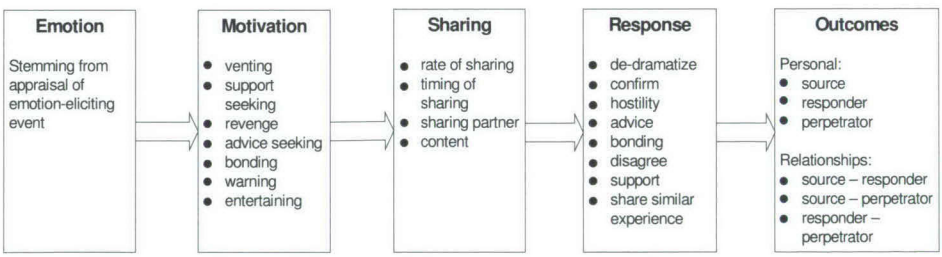

Figure 6.2

The social sharing process

At the center of the model is the act of social sharing itself – sharing the emotional episode with others. This sharing is preceded by a triggering event. More specifically, the social sharing process starts with the *appraisal* of a triggering event. As a situation can be viewed differently by different persons or at different times, it is the way the situation is perceived (thus not the situation in itself) that affects the person, and his or her tendency to share. The appraisal of the situation evokes certain emotions (Roseman & Smith,

2001). As social sharing concerns talking about emotional experiences, it is the experience of emotions (as a consequence of appraising the situation) that is necessary for sharing to occur.

Motivations

After emotion elicitation, people become motivated to share their emotions with others. The studies reported in this dissertation show that, rather than a direct relationship between emotions and sharing, there is a motivation that drives people to share their emotions. There are various motivations that can drive people to share their emotions, and which motivation is relevant is dependent on the specific emotion that people share. The MDA in Chapter 3 revealed that motivations for sharing can be classified according to their focus, and their constructiveness/destructiveness.

Responses

When people share their emotions, they have a preference to receive a certain response from the responder. There is also the response they actually obtain. The preferred response and the received response should be taken into account when assessing the outcomes of sharing. The present research demonstrated that the responder has an important and influential role in social sharing. This conclusion is partly based on the findings in Chapter 4 that the response that people receive is very influential in determining the outcomes of sharing. Additional support for the proposed influential role of the responder comes from Chapter 5 in which it was shown that it also matters with whom people share their emotions. Whereas people can share with someone who is not involved in the negative situation as well as with the perpetrator of the negative emotions, previous studies on sharing did not make this distinction and implicitly focused talking with a third party (Harber, 2005; Luminet et al., 2000; Rimé et al., 1998; Rimé et al., 1991). It is also important to realize that the effect of a particular response to sharing depends on the congruency with the emotion it is given to, rather than being uniform. This finding is in accordance with literature on consolation that showed that communal responses are more satisfactory when people share for communal reasons, and that agentic responses are more satisfactory when people share for agentic reasons (Horowitz et al., 2001).

Outcomes

Together, insight into the motivations for sharing and in the responses preferred and obtained to sharing are necessary steps in assessing its outcomes. Only by knowing why people share their emotions, which response they prefer, and which response they actually obtain, research can focus on whether people achieved what they wanted to achieve. This dissertation shows that the outcomes of social sharing go beyond emotional recovery and include various interpersonal aspects such as the relationship between the source and the responder. Thus, social sharing should be conceived of as an interactive process that can be driven by various motivations, dependent on the emotion that people share, that can yield various consequences. These results suggest that the consequences should be perceived in light of the shared emotion and the related motivation for sharing. There are clearly different things that people may want to achieve by sharing. For example, in some cases, they hope to improve their relationships, in other cases they want to get rid of their negative emotions, and in other cases they may try to warn their interaction partner. As a result, some consequences can be very important in some situations, but not in others. For example, when people share for motivations of bonding, it is very important for them that they feel that the relationship with their interaction partner was improved by sharing. However, when people share because they want to take revenge at the perpetrator, the relationship with their interaction partner is not relevant.

Sharing partner

Beyond the different consequences that sharing produces, the results of Chapter 5 show that sharing with the perpetrator yields more positive consequences than sharing with a third party. These findings shed new light on the investigation of social sharing. Rather than assuming that people share with a third, non-involved party, research should take into account with who people share their negative emotions. This finding is in line with research on consumer psychology which makes a similar distinction: Negative word-of-mouth communication occurs when consumers talk informally with non-involved others about their negative consumption experiences (Anderson, 1998), whereas complaining is directed at the perpetrator of the negative situation (Singh, 1988). Research on consumer behavior also supports the idea that complaining and word-of-mouth are distinct behaviors (Halstead, 2002).

Also the finding that sharing with the perpetrator yields more positive results corresponds to findings on consumer behavior. Dissatisfied consumers who complained to the firm or service provider show larger increases in satisfaction than dissatisfied people who engaged in word-of-mouth communication (Nyer & Gopinath, 2005). In addition, Zeelenberg and Pieters (2004) showed that consumers felt less inert when they had complained more, and that they more inert when they had engaged in more word-of-mouth communication. That is, when people shared with a third party, they do not feel that they 'did something' about the negative situation, whereas they do have this feeling when they shared with the perpetrator. The findings of the present research and the literature on consumer psychology clearly show that sharing with the perpetrator and sharing with a third party should be disentangled. Acknowledging the importance of the involvement of the interaction partner in the negative situation contributes to a better understanding of social sharing.

In the studies reported in Chapter 5, the response of the perpetrator was not taken into account. As shown in Chapter 4, however, the response that people receive when they share their emotions plays a substantive role in determining its outcomes. Integrating the findings of these two chapters suggests that the outcomes of sharing with the perpetrator may also be influenced by the response that is provided by the perpetrator. The influence of the response may even be larger when people share with the perpetrator compared to when they share with a third party. After all, the perpetrator played an active role in the negative situation, and his/her response may therefore be very influential. If the perpetrator does not take the source seriously, the negative emotions of the source may even increase after sharing them. In a similar vein, when the perpetrator responds by repairing the negative situation, this may increase positive feelings (Maxham, 2001). Related to this, sharing with the perpetrator frequently has the additional benefit of reparation of the situation. Since the perpetrator is the person who evoked the negative emotions, this person may also be able to reduce them, for example by apologizing, by providing explanations on why something happened, or by even turning back the situation. Combining the findings that responses play an important role in determining the outcomes of sharing, and that sharing with the perpetrator yields more positive consequences than sharing with a third party provides an interesting avenue for future research on social sharing.

EXPLAINING PREVIOUS RESULTS ON EMOTIONAL RECOVERY

Together, the results of the present dissertation shed a new light on the beneficial effects of sharing. Previous research did not find that sharing was related to emotional recovery (Rimé et al., 1998). The present research may help in explaining this finding. The findings of Chapter 4 clearly show that social sharing yields positive effects when the emotion and response are congruent. However, if specific emotions would not have been distinguished, these effects would have disappeared. Both main effects of response on the evaluation of the self and the evaluation of the interaction partner were not significant. This indicates that not the response in isolation determines the outcomes of sharing, but rather its interaction with the specific emotion that is shared. In a similar vein, the main effect of emotion on evaluation of the interaction partner was far from significant, indicating that this outcome is not dependent on the specific emotion that people share, but rather on its interaction with the response that is received. Thus, the effects of social sharing are dependent on the specific emotion that people share, the response they receive, and on the congruency between these two. The fact that these aspects were not taken into account by previous research on the effects of social sharing may explain why this research failed to find beneficial effects. If all data of Chapter 4 are aggregated, the positive effects of sharing wash away – there would be no effects if the outcomes of sharing would be assessed regardless of the emotion shared and the response received. This may explain the findings of previous social sharing research, since this research addressed its outcomes without paying attention to specific emotion or response.

EXTENDING RELATED RESEARCH

The findings of this dissertation may have implications for other, related streams of literature. I will discuss these implications below.

Word-of-mouth communication

This research is closely connected to research in marketing on word-of-mouth communication. The main focus of that line of research was on the antecedents of word-of-mouth communication (i.e., which factors in the situation determine whether people will share their experience) and on the consequences of listening to word-of-mouth communication. The research

presented in this dissertation extends the word-of-mouth communication literature by focusing on the source of the message – which motivations are driving this behavior, when is a specific motivation relevant, and which responses are preferred. Traditional research on word-of-mouth takes the perspective of the firm or service provider about which the negative message is spread. One of the main goals of word-of-mouth research is thus to increase insights in word-of-mouth in order to understand, predict, and control it better.

From this point of view, insight into the motivations for word-of-mouth may be useful because the motivations may reflect in the content of the communication that is spread to others. Because it influences other (potential) customers strongly, negative word-of-mouth is known to be detrimental for firms (Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991). However, because negative word-of-mouth may be driven by various motivations, the damage of word-of-mouth to firms may depend on the motivation that is driving the word-of-mouth, and specifically how these motivations are expressed in behavior. People may talk differently when they want to take revenge from when they search for advice. The present research suggests that the content of word-of-mouth may also be related to the emotion that is experienced. More specifically, the findings of Chapter 3 suggest that angry, frustrated and irritated consumers may spread more destructive word-of-mouth than uncertain, disappointed or regretful consumers. Consumers who experience anger, frustration, or irritation may be likely to spread negative word-of-mouth in order to take revenge at the firm. These communications are probably very negative for the firm, because when consumers engage in word-of-mouth in order to take revenge they may spread messages that slander the firm. This difference in destructiveness of word-of-mouth after different emotions suggests that it may be useful to pay attention to the specific emotion that is felt by a consumer who communicates about a negative experience. In a similar vein, word-of-mouth may be more self-focused after uncertainty, and to a smaller extent after anger and frustration, but more other-focused after experiences of regret and irritation. Empirical testing of these ideas is an interesting avenue for future research.

Additionally, research on consumer behavior has focused on the impact of listening to negative messages, since this can influence other (potential) customers (Herr et al., 1991; Laczniak, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001).

However, word-of-mouth research seems to have overlooked the fact that the source of the negative communication is a customer as well. In other words, the receiver of the message is a (potential) customer who can be influenced by word-of-mouth, but this holds for the source of the message as well. Even from a marketing perspective, it is not only important to investigate the impact of listening to negative word-of-mouth communication, but also to investigate the impact of spreading negative word-of-mouth. If the intensity of the negative emotions experienced by dissatisfied customers reduces as a result of sharing, this is also beneficial for the service provider or firm. Integrating word-of-mouth literature and social sharing literature extends insights in word-of-mouth by focusing on the effects it has for the source. Previously, negative word-of-mouth was considered to be a behavior that is detrimental to firms (Anderson, 1998; Richins, 1983). The current findings show that negative word-of-mouth can have positive effects as well. Moreover, as in social sharing, previous research on word-of-mouth did not take the interaction between the source and the responder into account. The data presented here demonstrate that the interaction – or more specifically, the emotion-response congruency – plays a substantive role in determining the outcomes of word-of-mouth. Thus, when the received response is congruent with the shared emotion, word-of-mouth can lead to positive outcomes for the source. This implies that in some cases, it can even be beneficial to encourage dissatisfied customers to express displeasure.

Since word-of-mouth takes place between consumers, firms have little or no influence on the response that people receive. However, the results of this dissertation can be applied to complaint handling as well. When consumers express their dissatisfaction to the firm or service provider, the response they receive may be crucial in determining how they feel and think about the firm afterwards. Appropriate service recovery influences consumer satisfaction (Maxham, 2001). Careful consideration of how to respond to dissatisfied customers could contribute to more effective complaint handling. The results of this dissertation suggest, for example, that it may be wise to confirm angry customers instead of trying to calm them down. This way, they may get rid of their negative feelings and the evaluation of their interaction partner (in this case, the customer service) becomes more positive. When customer services know how to respond to dissatisfied customers, it might even be advantageous to encourage customers to express their displeasure, in order to resolve it.

Venting

Although it is not a separate stream of literature, some research has explored the venting of emotions, to which the findings of the present dissertation may also contribute. Catharsis theory (Breuer & Freud, 1955) already argued that people should vent their anger in order to prevent it from resulting in a more dangerous explosion. The core idea is that negative emotions could build up inside an individual, which could have negative psychological effects such as hysteria. If people do not let their anger out, it may explode in an aggressive way. Venting is seen as a way to get rid of the pressure that is caused by the negative feelings inside an individual. However, contemporary studies that tried to test this theory found that venting anger feeds the flame instead of extinguishing it (Bushman, 2002; Bushman et al., 1999). In these studies, anger was induced, and participants were instructed to vent their anger by hitting a punching bag while thinking of the perpetrator of their negative emotions. Afterwards, the participants are allowed to administer loud blasts of noise to the perpetrator, which is a measure of aggression. The intensity of the blasts of noise of the venting condition is compared to a distraction condition in which participants hit a punching bag while thinking of becoming physically fit, and with a control condition in which participants do not hit a punching bag. The results showed that participants who had vented were more aggressive than participants in the control condition and in the distraction condition. These results suggest that venting does not produce beneficial results.

Venting is one of the most common reasons to share, but it is important to realize that venting is only one of the motivations that may drive people to share their emotions, (Alicke et al., 1992; Kowalski, 1996). One of the main differences between studies on venting and on social sharing is that the former does concentrate on physical venting, whereas the latter is focused on verbal venting. Although both ways of venting are aimed at expressing the negative emotions, they may yield different consequences, since physical venting does not involve putting emotions into words. The data of this dissertation showed that not merely expression that is beneficial, but that the content of the interaction (that is, the motivation and the response that people receive) are crucial factors in determining the consequences of sharing. When venting negative emotions physically, people do not receive the response that is so crucial in determining its consequences. Investigating which responses are

preferred to verbal venting, and assessing its consequences is an interesting avenue for future research.

Writing

A different, though related stream of research on emotion expression concentrated on expression via writing (e.g., Esterling, L'Abate, Murray, & Pennebaker, 1999; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). In the typical writing paradigm, participants are randomly assigned to a writing group or a control group. Each group writes for 3 to 5 consecutive days, 15 to 30 minutes each day. The writing group is instructed to write about their deepest emotions and thoughts (or about traumas), the control group is instructed to write about superficial topics such as how they use their time. Participants do the writing in the lab and they do not receive feedback. Typical results of these studies are that writing produces beneficial effects in several ways, for example by improving immune functioning, and by producing long-term improvements in mood and psychological well-being (Smyth, 1998).

Obviously, both writing and talking involve putting emotions into words. However, some essential differences between writing research and social sharing research complicate integrating the findings. One of the key characteristics of social sharing is that it constitutes an interaction. Evidently, writing does not involve an interaction partner. Instead, when people write, they merely verbalize their emotions, but they do not receive a response. This makes writing about emotional experiences qualitatively different from talking about them with other people. In addition, research on writing and research on sharing have different foci. Whereas social sharing research mainly focused on talking about *emotions*, writing research investigated more broadly the effects of the disclosure of *personal events*. A final difference between studies on writing and studies on sharing is that they concentrate on different consequences. Whereas social sharing studies investigated whether sharing leads to emotional recovery, writing studies mainly investigated the effects of writing on health.

Although social sharing and writing are two qualitatively different behaviors, the present research may extend research on writing in several ways. First, the typical writing research neglects the importance of motivations; people write because they receive the instruction to write. In real life, people may have

different motivations for writing, as they have for sharing. They may for example write to ventilate their feelings, or to achieve cognitive clarity by structuring their thoughts. Which specific motivation is driving writing may also influence its outcomes. For example, when writing helped a person to blow off steam, but not to structure thoughts, this person may feel better if the underlying motivation was venting. However, if the underlying motivation was to achieve cognitive clarity, people may not feel better at all. Related to this is the second potential contribution of the data presented in this dissertation. The present data show that expression of emotions can have multiple consequences. Assessing a broader range of outcomes of emotional expression via writing may contribute to a better understanding of this behavior. More specifically, it could be important to keep in mind which motivation people have for writing, and to compare this motivation to the outcomes of writing. This way, research could test whether people achieved their goal. For example, when people are motivated to structure their thoughts when writing, research should test whether they gained cognitive clarity by writing. However, when people are motivated to get rid of negative feelings, research should test whether negative feelings are reduced after writing. The third potential contribution to writing research is that this dissertation demonstrates that the response plays an influential role in sharing. An interesting question is whether receiving a response would affect the consequences of writing. Research could investigate whether the effects of writing are different when people write when they know that someone will read it and respond to them. In cases of anger, this may be particularly helpful. After all, expressing emotions towards the perpetrator of the anger is associated with more positive emotions than expressing emotions towards an unrelated party. This finding could be helpful in relationship therapy in which people receive the instruction to write about their thoughts and feelings. The present research suggests that it might be helpful when people know that their partner will read what they wrote, and when they know they will receive a response.

IN CONCLUSION

By showing that motivations and responses play an important role in determining the outcomes of social sharing, and that the motivations and responses are dependent on specific emotions, I extended the process of social sharing as it has been conceptualized previously. The findings described in

this dissertation revealed that social sharing is an emotion-specific behavior that is driven by specific motivations, and to which people desire specific responses. Moreover, the findings showed that the emotion-response congruency is crucial in determining whether sharing yields beneficial results, and that it also matters whether the receiver of the sharing message is an uninvolved person or the person who is perceived to be responsible for the negative situation. By sharing these ideas and findings, I hope to have contributed to a better understanding of the intriguing phenomenon of sharing by showing that it should be conceived of as a motive-driven, interactive, emotion-specific behavior.

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Nederlandse Samenvatting
(Summary in Dutch)

Mensen praten dagelijks over hun negatieve emoties. Meer dan 85% van de negatieve gebeurtenissen die mensen meemaken wordt gedeeld met anderen. Een stroom van onderzoek in de afgelopen decennia richtte zich op dit sociaal delen van emoties en beschreef met wie, hoe snel en hoe vaak mensen over negatieve ervaringen praten. Buiten deze beschrijvende studies is er vrij weinig bekend over dit fenomeen. Wel is gebleken dat sociaal delen niet noodzakelijk leidt tot emotioneel herstel (dat is een vermindering van de intensiteit van de emotie die opgeroepen wordt door de gebeurtenis). In dit proefschrift werden verschillende aspecten van het sociaal delen onderzocht die belangrijk kunnen zijn bij het bepalen van de uitkomsten. Als we willen onderzoeken of het delen van emoties helpt, zullen we eerst moeten bekijken waarom mensen nou eigenlijk delen. Pas als we inzicht hebben in de motivaties voor het delen kunnen we kijken of mensen ook daadwerkelijk bereiken wat ze willen bereiken. Daarbij is het belangrijk ook te kijken naar de respons die mensen van hun gesprekspartner krijgen. Deze respons speelt namelijk een grote rol bij het bepalen of mensen datgene uit het delen halen wat ze graag wilden bereiken. Belangrijk bij deze vragen is ook dat verschillende emoties van elkaar onderscheiden worden. In plaats van het stellen van de algemene vragen 'waarom delen mensen hun emoties?' en 'welke respons krijgen mensen als zij hun emoties delen?', splitste ik deze vragen op en onderzocht ze voor verschillende emoties afzonderlijk. De gedachte hierachter was dat de motivaties om spijt te delen bijvoorbeeld heel verschillend kunnen zijn van de motivaties om boosheid te delen. De responsen die mensen krijgen kunnen eveneens verschillen per emotie.

De studies die zijn verricht richtten zich dus op de motivaties voor sociaal delen (waarom delen mensen hun emoties?), de respons die mensen graag krijgen (wat willen mensen graag horen van hun gesprekspartner als ze delen?) en de respons die ze daadwerkelijk ontvangen (hoe reageren gesprekspartners op mensen die hun emoties delen?). Verder is er onderzocht of de respons die mensen krijgen congruent moet zijn met de emotie die zij delen om te leiden tot positieve uitkomsten. Tenslotte is er gekeken of delen met de veroorzaker van de emoties leidt tot meer positieve uitkomsten dan delen met iemand die niet bij de situatie betrokken is (een derde partij) en waarom. De doelstellingen

van dit proefschrift waren (I) meer inzicht te verkrijgen in deze aspecten van sociaal delen, (II) te onderzoeken of sociaal delen emotie-specifiek gedrag is, en (III) om de voorwaarden waaronder sociaal delen tot positieve uitkomsten leidt in kaart te brengen.

Als we willen onderzoeken of het delen van emoties helpt, zullen we eerst moeten weten waarom mensen delen. Het doel van Hoofstuk 2 was om te testen of er verschillende motivaties zijn die ten grondslag kunnen liggen aan sociaal delen en om in kaart te brengen welke motivaties mensen kunnen hebben als ze hun emoties delen. Daarnaast werd onderzocht of de inzichten in sociaal delen verbeterd zouden kunnen worden door het onderscheiden van verschillende specifieke emoties. In Studie 2.1 herinnerden proefpersonen zich een negatieve gebeurtenis en gaven zij aan welke emoties ze toen voelden en waarom zij toen hun emoties deelden. Om een duidelijker beeld te krijgen van de samenhang van emoties met motivaties heb ik in Studie 2.2 gesampled op emoties in plaats van ze te meten. Proefpersonen vulden elke avond een dagboek in over emoties die zij die dag hadden ervaren. Op dagen dat zij boosheid of spijt hadden ervaren kregen ze de instructie om een vragenlijst in te vullen over hun redenen om deze emoties te delen. Een structureel vergelijkingsmodel op de data van Studie 2.1 en een MANOVA met univariate analyses op de data van Studie 2.2 toonden aan dat er inderdaad verschillende motivaties zijn om emoties te delen. Daarbij lieten de resultaten zien dat de motivatie die relevant is afhangt van de emotie die mensen delen. Iets specifieker: mensen die boosheid delen worden eerder gedreven door motivaties om negatieve gevoelens te spuien, steun te zoeken en wraak te nemen dan mensen die spijt delen. Mensen die spijt delen worden eerder gedreven door de motivaties om advies te zoeken, de sociale banden te versterken, hun gesprekspartner te waarschuwen of deze te vermaken. Deze resultaten geven het eerste bewijs voor het idee dat het aannemen van de emotie-specifieke benadering in het onderzoek naar sociaal delen nuttig is. Daarbij tonen de resultaten aan dat de motivatie die mensen drijft om hun emoties te delen afhangt van de specifieke emotie die zij delen. Sociaal delen is dus emotie-specifiek gedrag dat gedreven kan worden door verschillende motivaties.

Hoofdstuk 3 bouwt voort op Hoofdstuk 2 door voor een breder scala van emoties te onderzoeken met welke motivaties zij verbonden zijn. Om een meer

homogene set van situaties te onderzoeken richtte dit hoofdstuk zich op een specifiek type situaties – negatieve consumptie situaties. In Studie 3.1 werd proefpersonen gevraagd om zich een negatieve consumptie ervaring te herinneren en om te rapporteren welke emoties ze bij die ervaring voelden. Het bleek dat boosheid, spijt, frustratie, irritatie, teleurstelling en onzekerheid de belangrijkste emoties zijn in deze situaties. In Studie 3.2 is er gekeken of deze emoties samenhangen met bepaalde motivaties voor sociaal delen. Opnieuw werd er gesampled op de emoties in plaats van ze te meten. Proefpersonen kregen de instructie om zich een negatieve consumptie ervaring te herinneren waarin ze een bepaalde emotie (boosheid, spijt, frustratie, irritatie, teleurstelling of onzekerheid) ervoeren. Vervolgens gaven zij aan waarom ze over die ervaring gepraat hadden met anderen. De resultaten van deze studies leveren opnieuw bewijs voor het idee dat de motivatie voor sociaal delen afhankelijk is van de specifieke emotie die gedeeld wordt. Een multipele discriminant analyse (MDA) op de data van Studie 3.2 toonde aan dat het delen van ervaringen van boosheid, frustratie en irritatie wordt gedreven door de motivaties om gevoelens te spuien en wraak te nemen. Het delen van spijt hangt samen met motivaties om sociale banden te versterken, de gesprekspartner te waarschuwen of te entertainen. Ervaringen van teleurstelling worden gedeeld om steun te zoeken, advies te krijgen, of de gesprekspartner te waarschuwen. Het delen van spijt hangt samen met de motivaties om steun en advies te zoeken. De MDA in Studie 3.2 liet eveneens zien dat de motivaties voor het delen van negatieve consumptie ervaringen geclassificeerd kunnen worden op twee dimensies, namelijk destructief versus constructief en zelf-gericht versus ander-gericht. Dit hoofdstuk gaf dus opnieuw bewijs voor het idee dat sociaal delen een emotie-specifiek gedrag is. Daarbij breidde het de bevindingen van Hoofdstuk 2 uit door voor een breder scala van negatieve emoties aan te tonen aan welke motivaties ze gerelateerd zijn en door twee dimensies te onthullen waarop de motivaties kunnen worden onderscheiden.

Als mensen verschillende motivatie hebben om hun emoties te delen, dan zou het ook weleens zo kunnen zijn dat een bepaald gesprek soms wel helpt, maar soms ook niet. Hierbij is het belangrijk in gedachten te houden dat sociaal delen een interactie is en niet alleen maar het uitdrukken van emoties. De respons die mensen krijgen heeft waarschijnlijk een grote invloed op hoe mensen zich voelen na het delen. Stel je voor dat je gesprekspartner naar je

luistert en een arm om je heenslaat. Als je praat omdat je steun zoekt, kan deze reactie je helpen. Wanneer je echter praat omdat je advies wilt, ben je waarschijnlijk weinig gebaat bij deze reactie. In Hoofdstuk 4 keek ik naar de rol van de respons die mensen krijgen en de effecten van deze respons op de uitkomst van sociaal delen. Het doel van dit hoofdstuk was om te testen of de respons inderdaad van invloed is op de uitkomst van het delen en om de emotie-respons congruentie hypothese te testen. Deze hypothese stelt dat de uitkomsten van sociaal delen afhankelijk zijn van de congruentie tussen de emotie die mensen delen en de respons die ze krijgen. In Studies 4.1 en 4.2 keken proefpersonen naar een video waarin de hoofdpersoon ofwel boosheid ofwel spijt ervoer. Hierna gaven de proefpersonen aan welke respons ze graag zouden krijgen als ze in de positie waren van de hoofdpersoon (Studie 4.1) of welke respons ze zouden geven als ze naar de hoofdpersoon zouden luisteren (Studie 4.2). ANOVA's lieten zien dat de respons die mensen graag krijgen afhankelijk is van welke specifieke emotie zij delen. Boze mensen geven de voorkeur aan responsen die hun negatieve emoties bevestigen, of die vijandigheid ten opzichte van de veroorzaker van de emotie uitdrukken. Mensen die spijt delen willen graag dat hun gesprekspartner advies geeft, het oneens met ze is of de situatie relativeert. Studie 4.2 liet zien dat de responsen die mensen daadwerkelijk ontvangen minder emotie-specifiek zijn. In Studie 4.3 werd de emotie-respons congruentie hypothese getest en bevestigd. Mensen die spijt delen ervaren positieve consequenties van het delen wanneer zij een relativerende respons hebben gekregen, maar niet wanneer zij een bevestigende respons hebben gekregen. Dit in tegenstelling tot boze mensen, die juist meer hebben aan een bevestigende respons in plaats van een relativerende respons. Dit hoofdstuk gaf opnieuw bewijs voor het idee dat sociaal delen een emotie-specifieke gedraging is. Daarbij toonden de resultaten het belang aan van de respons die mensen ontvangen in het bepalen van de uitkomsten van het sociaal delen.

Hoofdstuk 5 gaat een stap verder dan de bestaande literatuur over sociaal delen. Deze stroming van onderzoek heeft altijd aangenomen dat mensen delen met iemand die niet betrokken is bij de situatie die de negatieve emoties opriep, dus een derde partij. Echter in het dagelijks leven delen mensen ook vaak met de persoon die ze verantwoordelijk achten voor de negatieve situatie. Dit zou kunnen leiden tot andere uitkomsten. Het doel van Hoofdstuk 5 was dus het onderzoeken of delen met de veroorzaker tot meer positieve emoties

leidt dan het delen met een derde partij. Deze vraag werd getest in Studie 5.1 door middel van een scenario en in Studie 5.2 door middel van een experimentele labstudie waarin echte emoties geïnduceerd werden en waarin proefpersonen werd gevraagd deze emoties te delen met ofwel de veroorzaker, ofwel een derde partij. De resultaten van deze studies lieten zien dat delen met de veroorzaker leidt tot intensere positieve emoties. In Studie 5.3 werden verschillende verklaringen hiervoor getest door middel van een scenariostudie. De resultaten hiervan lieten zien dat de positieve uitkomsten van het delen met de veroorzaker verklaard kunnen worden doordat mensen in deze gevallen het gevoel hebben dat ze voor zichzelf zijn opgekomen. Deze studie liet ook zien dat gevoelens van wraak niet relevant zijn in het verklaren van de positieve effecten van delen met de veroorzaker.

Samengevat leveren de bevindingen van dit proefschrift verschillende bijdragen aan de reeds bestaande literatuur over sociaal delen. Ten eerste laten ze zien dat sociaal delen gezien moet worden als emotie-specifiek gedrag, dus dat verschillende aspecten ervan per emotie verschillen. Deze resultaten impliceren dat toekomstig onderzoek naar sociaal delen onderscheid zou moeten maken tussen verschillende specifieke emoties, in plaats van aan te nemen dat het een concept is dat voor alle emoties gelijk is. Ten tweede laat het huidige onderzoek zien dat verschillende motivaties sociaal delen kunnen implementeren. Welke motivatie relevant is, hangt af van de emotie die mensen delen. De derde bijdrage van dit proefschrift is dat het laat zien dat de respons die mensen ontvangen ook belangrijke aspecten zijn bij het bepalen van de uitkomsten van delen. Meer specifieker liet dit proefschrift zien dat de uitkomsten van delen afhangen van de congruentie tussen de emotie die gedeeld wordt en de respons die ontvangen wordt. Ten vierde laten de resultaten zien dat het nuttig is om er rekening mee te houden met wie mensen delen: delen met de veroorzaker leidt tot meer positieve uitkomsten dan delen met een derde partij. Tenslotte laten de bevindingen van dit proefschrift zien dat het waardevol is om andere uitkomsten van sociaal delen te onderzoeken naast emotioneel herstel, wat altijd de belangrijkste focus is geweest van eerder onderzoek naar sociaal delen. De data laten zien dat verschillende aspecten van het welzijn beïnvloed kunnen worden als mensen hun emoties delen, afhankelijk van de emotie die ze delen.

Dankwoord

Social sharing forms a considerable part of our daily lives (Rimé et al., 1991). Dit proefschrift had nooit bestaan als ik mijn emoties niet had kunnen delen met een aantal mensen die ik hier graag wil bedanken. Natuurlijk op de eerste plaats mijn promotores, Marcel en Rik. Marcel, ik herinner me als de dag van gisteren dat ik aanklopte ergens achterin gang 7, op zoek naar Professor Zeelenberg, om te vragen of ik bij "u" mocht afstuderen. Even later was ik ook je student-assistent en daarna je eerste echte eigen AiO. Ik heb ontzettend veel van je geleerd. Ook op persoonlijk vlak was het fijn om met je samen te werken. Ik ben blij dat jij mijn coach was en ik ben er trots op jouw pupil te zijn. Rik, als jij er niet was geweest, hadden onze papers er een stuk ongestructureerder uitgezien en waren de analyses nooit geweest wat ze nu zijn. Als ik ergens vast zat, deden gesprekken met jou altijd wonderen. Ineens was het volstrekt duidelijk hoe het paper gepositioneerd moest worden, welke analyses gedraaid moesten worden, of hoe de vraag geoperationaliseerd moest worden. De hoge lat die jullie altijd neerlegden heeft soms voor wat frustraties gezorgd, maar ik zie wel waar het me heeft gebracht. Dankjewel voor jullie geduld en coaching.

Het schijnt dat AiO's een eenzaam beroep hebben. Toch heb ik mij nooit eenzaam gevoeld. De 'club' sociale psychologie in Tilburg was een fijne club om in te werken, die ook zorgde voor de nodige afleiding. In het bijzonder wil ik mijn kamergenootje Maike bedanken, door wie ik in dipjes altijd weer kon lachen om conference calls (sorry iedereen), het planten van radijsijskegels (r.i.p.) en het bedenken van woorden met ...a.....r (we hebben er 65). Maar ook Seger, voor zijn onuitputtelijke relativeringsvermogen, Dianne voor haar steun tijdens mijn eerstejaarsdip, Marijke voor haar humor en steun en Sas voor haar geduld, energie en afleidende gesprekken (hihi) in mijn laatste jaar.

Naast mijn directe collega's zijn er nog een aantal mensen die geholpen hebben bij dit proefschrift, dus bedank ik mijn onderzoekspracticumgroepjes en mijn afstudeerders Karen, Marieke, Larissa, Femke, Marleen en Mirjam voor hun input en hulp bij de dataverzameling. Verder bedank ik Ben voor zijn altijd aanwezige geduld ("ik haal het nooit"), luisterend oor en vertrouwen, Thijs voor al zijn rollen in de afgelopen jaren, Suus en Mieke voor het ontwerpen van de kaft en Ton Heinen voor het zijn van zo'n goede AiO-beschermer.

De afgelopen vier jaar waren nooit zo fijn verlopen als ik naast het werk niet de nodige rust en ontspanning had kunnen vinden. Hoe kan ik anders dan hier op de eerste plaats Maartje noemen. Maartjelief, wat ben ik blij met onze vriendschap en wat ben ik je dankbaar voor de afgelopen jaren. Verder bedank ik musketier Daan voor alle steun, plezier en wijze inzichten, Frank because I'm not the only one of me, Wendy voor (optie) tien jaar superfijne vriendschap, Claudia en Marcel voor de rust en ontspanning die ik altijd bij jullie vind, en Loek omdat je er weer bent (hoewel je nooit bent weggeweest).

De laatste fase van je AiO-periode is meestal vrij stressvol voor je relatie. Ik begon in de Avond van mijn AiO-periode juist aan mijn relatie. Peeter, wat ben ik blij dat je het aandurfde. Het voelt zo goed dat je naast me staat in plaats van tegenover me zit in de commissie. Ik geloof in jou en mij.

Mijn zusje Sandra bedank ik voor haar onaflatende steun. Zwusje, jij hebt altijd achter mij gestaan en dat is een heerlijk gevoel. Dan mijn ouders. Papa en mama, jullie keendje is klaar. Dankjewel voor de fijne thuishaven waar ik altijd welkom ben, voor jullie trots, vertrouwen en betrokkenheid. We hebben het al zo vaak gezegd; zo'n band met je ouders is zeldzaam. Het duifje zal haar kooitje nooit, nooit, nooit vergeten.

Inge Wetzer
2 oktober 2006

Stellingen

behorend bij het proefschrift

Let's talk about it:
Studies on the social sharing of emotions

Inge M. Wetzer

1. Gedeelde smart is niet altijd halve smart.

2. Bij emoties is het, in tegenstelling tot wat veel mensen denken, niet alleen belangrijk dat je ze deelt, maar vooral ook *waarom* en *met wie* je ze deelt.

3. Voor een passende reactie op iemand die emoties deelt, dien je niet alleen te luisteren naar wat deze persoon zegt, maar dien je je tevens af te vragen welke motivatie hij heeft om te delen.

4. Het delen van emoties met derden heeft positieve consequenties indien de respons die ontvangen wordt congruent is met de specifieke emotie die mensen delen.

5. Als je boos bent moet je de post bestellen bij degene voor wie hij bestemd is.

6. Het delen van boosheid met degene die je er verantwoordelijk voor houdt, heeft reeds positieve consequenties op het moment dat je de emotie hebt geuit.

7. Je wordt een betere vriend door het lezen van dit proefschrift.

8. Sociaal psychologen richten zich met name op vragen die publiceerbaar en onderzoekbaar zijn, dit zijn niet noodzakelijkerwijs de meest interessante vragen.

9. Data is meervoud, dus data *zijn* en data *tonen aan* (Van Dale, 2005).

10. Vergeven is het loslaten van de hoop op een beter verleden.

11. Everything worth having is worth fighting for.

12. "Als je een avondje gaat zitten met je paranimfen, heb je zo twaalf stellingen" (Marcel Zeelenberg, 2006)

UITNODIGING

voor de promotie van

Inge M. Wetzer

Let's talk about it: Studies on the social sharing of emotions

vrijdag 9 februari 2007
om 14:00 uur

In de aula van de
Universiteit van Tilburg

Receptie na afloop

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People share their negative experiences and ensuing emotions with others all the time. This behavior, called the social sharing of negative emotions, is the central theme of the present dissertation. This dissertation reports a series of studies on different aspects of social sharing, such as the motivation for sharing and the responses that people receive. More specifically, the questions addressed in this dissertation are: Why do people share their negative emotions? Which response do people prefer to obtain from their interaction partner? Which response do they actually obtain? Is sharing different for specific emotions? Are the consequences of sharing dependent on the emotion that people share and the response they receive? And, does it matter whether people share with someone unrelated to the negative experience, or with the person (held) responsible for it?

Each of these questions is investigated by means of empirical studies which are based on theoretical perspectives from social psychology and marketing.